

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #21

Judges 15:1-20

There is a story about a Sunday school teacher who was teaching some boys in a class and he held up a watch and asked “what is it for?” The boys said, “To tell time.” The teacher said, “Suppose the watch does not tell time, what is it good for?” The boys said, “It is good for nothing.” Then the teacher held up a pencil and said, “What is the pencil for?” The boys said, “To write with.” Then the teacher said, “Suppose the pencil doesn’t write, what is it good for?” The boys said, “It is good for nothing.” Then the teacher held up a knife and said, “What is this for?” The boys said, “To cut things.” Then the teacher said, “Suppose this knife is so dull it cannot cut. What is it good for?” The boys said, “It is good for nothing.” Then the teacher said, “What is the chief purpose of a human being?” The boys said, “To glorify God.” The teacher said, “Suppose the person does not glorify God, what is he good for?” The boys said, “He is good for nothing.”

The goal of every human being should be to glorify God. But suppose a believer does not glorify God; does that really mean the person is “good for nothing?” It certainly is true that Jesus made this kind of point when he said that we are supposed to be the salt of the earth, and if we are not affecting the world we aren’t good for much of anything (Matthew 5:13).

Years ago when I worked for Kregel Publishing, I would have to travel and make book presentations at different publisher conferences. I became good friends with some of the other reps from other companies. I really liked a guy from Baker Books who had a good sense of humor. He would often begin his presentation by saying something like this; “God has saved me so you can look at me and say there is a bad example of what a Christian should be.” He said, “You need some bad examples or else you can’t recognize good ones.” He was a great Christian and a good example. But his humor brings out a point- God can use even bad examples for His glory.

No matter what you think about Samson’s personal life, the fact is he does show up in the faith hero chapter of Hebrews 11:32 among a list of some very powerful men of God. Samson is named as a faith hero in some very exalted company. David was a man after God’s own heart. Samuel was the first prophet who did some amazing things. We have already seen the great accomplishments of Gideon, Barak and Jephthah. It is true that Samson had a real problem with lusts and sex. He was unstable emotionally, but make no mistake about this; **Samson loved God, Samson trusted God and Samson did amazing things for God.** When we get to heaven, I don’t think too many will have the nerve to go up and question Samson. He was an amazing man of God who was used probably far more than any of us will ever be. What we see here is:

GOD CONTINUES TO SOVEREIGNLY USE SAMSON TO DESTROY MORE PHILISTINES THROUGH A SERIES OF NEGATIVE CIRCUMSTANCES AND SITUATIONS.

We may remember that Samson married a Philistine woman against the wishes of his godly parents. But God said the parents did not know that His hand was in this because He intended to use this as a means of beginning the process of destroying the Philistines (Judges 14:4).

What happens in chapter 15 is a sovereign sequel to chapter 14. There are three negative circumstances that Samson finds himself in that God will specifically use to accomplish His purposes. There is a lesson for all of us to learn. When we find ourselves in negative situations and circumstances in which it appears as though our entire world has just caved in, we need to specifically look for ways to glorify God and be used by God. God is the One who controls the circumstances and when we are in them, we are in a good position to glorify Him.

NEGATIVE CIRCUMSTANCE #1 – God sovereignly uses Samson to slaughter Philistines at Timnah through the negative circumstance of Samson losing his wife. **15:1-8**

According to **verse 1**, some time had passed and Samson had calmed down and he decided to go visit his wife at the time of the “wheat harvest” which, according to Dr. Leon Wood, was probably sometime near the end of June or July (*Distressing Days of the Judges*, p. 314). This is critical to the story. Because things are dry at this time of year, Samson will use that to his advantage.

As we saw last time, Samson’s wife was a beautiful woman and he was still legally married to her so he went to be with her. He took a young goat with him as a peace offering to give her and headed to Timnah. What woman wouldn’t be moved by receiving a pet goat? Everyone knows you can truly melt a woman’s heart if you bring her a goat. Actually, in this culture it would be like giving her a puppy, or flowers or candy.

When he got to Timnah, his father-in-law would not let Samson go to be with his wife, because according to **verse 2**, her father had given her to another man. The father-in-law truly thought Samson hated his daughter, so he gave her to another man. Then the father said “take a look at her younger sister because she is better looking than the one you picked.” He said take her for your wife. Samson did not want the younger sister. It was his wife who looked good to him, not her sister.

Well Samson responded to this in **verse 3** by saying basically “Don’t blame me for what I am going to do because this is your fault.” Samson did not want a marital substitute and the reason for this whole mess was because the Philistines had put pressure on his wife to reveal the riddle. They put pressure on her until she blabbed. So the real cause of the trouble was those thirty Philistines. Samson said, well they have cost me my wife and it will cost them their life.

According to **verse 4**, Samson caught 300 foxes and tied their tails together and tied a torch between their tails and lit the torch, and they ran into the Philistine crop fields and set them on fire. Now it was harvest time and this was a farming culture so if you burn the fields, you are costing the Philistines their livelihood and their food. Of course, they shouldn’t be farming this land at all because this is Israel’s land, which is exactly why God was using Samson.

Samson was a good trapper and hunter, plus the hand of God is helping him harvest this many animals. This is no small accomplishment to capture 300 foxes. This is an amazing feat which probably has never been duplicated in history. He tied two tails together, lit a torch and turned them loose.

I have seen some foxes on my way home from church and they are typically crossing into the crop areas. Now the reason why he tied the tails together is because they would zigzag in all kinds of different directions and they could not run into their holes; they would run in all different directions.

According to **verse 5**, when he let those foxes go they ran into every kind of Philistine agricultural field. They ran into corn fields, grain fields, vineyards and orchards. Every place was burning. As Herbert Wolf said “The fire spread with incredible speed” (*Judges*, p. 470).

Samson burned up the Philistine harvest. This is an interesting point, because according to God’s law if you started a fire and ruined someone’s crops you were required to make restitution (Exodus 22:6). But this principle was only operative when Israel was in the land. The land was being dominated by Philistines, so Samson was burning them out.

According to **verse 6**, the Philistines wanted to know who did this and they were told it was Samson and they were told why he did it. Now the Philistines didn’t want to go up against Samson, so they went into Timnah and burned Samson’s wife and her father. **It is so ironic that the Philistines threatened this woman that if she did not tell them the riddle, they would burn her and her father’s house (14:15), but she actually gets burned because she betrayed Samson and did tell them the riddle. Godless people are not people you can trust.**

According to **verses 7-8**, when Samson learned of that he took revenge on them and he killed the Philistines “ruthlessly” with a “great slaughter.” That Hebrew word “ruthlessly” literally means “leg on thigh” (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 812). Actually, the King James translates this word “hip and thigh.” The significance of the word is that apparently God so empowered Samson that he literally tore Philistines apart with his bare hands, and may have stacked body parts on top of each other. This is not the normal strength of a man; this is of God.

After Samson did this, he moved to “the cleft of the rock of Etam” (**v. 8**). This location is uncertain; however, he certainly did not do this because he was scared. It must have been a good place for Samson to hide out and look out and plan his next move. It was some hidden elevated high place where Samson could have a good visual of incoming Philistines. A guy who could kill a lion with his bare hands and trap 300 foxes and tie tails together is used to the outdoors. He knows how to survive in the outdoors. This was a single handed slaughter. Samson is destroying Philistines single-handedly, because God’s hand is on him.

This is more than just revenge because had he wanted revenge, he could have just taken his wife and destroyed those who had a part in it. But he is now on a mission; a mission that is from God, which is to destroy the Philistines.

Who would ever think God could be working in a marriage that falls apart? Who would ever think that God could be working in raging fires that are burning thousands of acres? Who would ever think that God could be working in a circumstance in which your wife is killed? That is exactly the circumstance God used to accomplish His purpose.

NEGATIVE CIRCUMSTANCE #2 – God sovereignly uses Samson to kill 1000 Philistines at Lehi through the negative circumstance of Samson losing national support and personal freedom.
15:9-17

Samson was from the tribe of Dan, but he was hunkered down in the land of Judah. The Philistines formed a posse of at least 1000 highly trained military men and they tracked him to the Lehi area. Their goal is to put a stop to him. It is interesting that the word “Lehi” means jawbone.

The men of Judah were quick to spot the 1000 Philistines and they wanted to know why they were there (**15:9-10**). The men from Judah thought that the Philistines had come to fight them. But the Philistines told them they had come to arrest Samson, because of what he had done to them. He slaughtered a bunch of them so this is what they intended to do to him. They wanted to bind him and burn him.

Now what is so odd about **verse 11** is that Israel got together about 3000 men, which means they outnumber the Philistines by 3 to 1. They did not gather them to fight the Philistines, but to track down one of their own. This shows you how distorted Israel had become. They didn't want any conflict. They wanted peace with the enemy. They went to Samson like a bunch of cowardly wimps and said the Philistines are mad and why did you do this “to us.” **Instead of commending Samson for his accomplishments, they are blaming Samson for their uneasiness.** The Philistines weren't even supposed to be in this land. **Do you see this; the men of Judah were rallying around the enemies against a true Spirit empowered man of God. They go to Samson and ask him why he did what he did.** What Samson was doing was what Israel was supposed to be doing. He was fighting the enemy, which is what God wanted Israel to do.

There is something else to observe from **verse 11**. Samson killed the Philistines out of personal revenge. He did not initially do it because he had been a man of prayer. He did it out of his own personal revenge. **Here is the amazing point of God's sovereignty; God can use things we do to accomplish His purpose, when His purpose is not the reason we are doing what we are doing.**

There isn't a true believer who hasn't seen this happen. We have seen it here. There are those people who don't do a thing to build the church and some people will rally around the deadbeats more than those doing things for God.

Observation #1 - Judah was so at home with the Philistines she didn't even recognize a true man of God who had God's power on him.

There are many people who go to church who are believers, who are so at home in this world that is anti-God that they don't even recognize the importance of a careful exposition of God's inspired Word and reverent worship.

Observation #2 - Judah was so neutered in her spirituality she was ignored by the Philistines.

Most churches are totally ignored by the world because the world gets along with them just fine. But when you are a church on the front lines of communicating God's Word, it won't be ignored by the world. It will be hated and hounded.

Observation #3 - Judah was doing the Philistine's work for them.

They were out tracking down Samson for the Philistines. In other words, God's own people were doing Satan's will.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you and I need to realize that **we are not called to have peace with this world; we are called to have peace with God. We are in war with this world and it is time that some of God's people wake up to this reality.** The Bible does not ever teach peace at any cost with a lost, godless world. The Bible does not teach a "don't make waves" message of passivity. We are in war. Judah lost sight of that and so have many in church today.

Now **verses 12-13** speak volumes for Samson. He could have run from the Israelites and got away. He could have attacked the Israelites and won. Instead, he allows them to bind him and lead him straight into the middle of the 1000 Philistines. **Samson saw this as an opportunity to take out more Philistines.** He let them bind him with "new ropes" (v. 13), which all thought would be more secure than old ropes.

According to **verses 14-15**, they bound Samson with ropes and they brought him to the Philistines, and the Philistines were so happy they shouted with joy. You have 3000 men from Judah and you have well over 1000 Philistines and then you have one Samson who is tied up with new ropes. Samson went right into the middle of the Philistines, and when they shouted the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson. You cannot ever accuse Samson of being a coward. He was a brave man of faith.

When the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, he snapped those ropes like they were made of paper. He found the fresh jawbone of a donkey, which would mean it was moist, not brittle, and it still had the teeth in it. This would be a ferocious weapon in Samson's hand. He started whirling and swinging and slashing, and when it was all over he had single-handedly dropped and killed 1000 Philistines. The rest probably ran away and fled.

The odds of 1000 to 1 are more than what Gideon faced at 400 to 1 (Judges 7:7). These are impossible odds. Furthermore, his weapon is the jawbone of a donkey. **Samson fought and not one Jew lifted a finger to even help him.** They all stood around and watched him fight. Judah should be ashamed of themselves. They are totally passive and inactive while Samson is doing all the fighting.

It is like that in the church at times. You get some who are on the front lines for God and some of the people of the church are as dead as doorposts. They just sit around and watch and never bother to help in the warfare. They don't take a stand and defend the work; they listen to the enemy talk.

Just imagine what would happen if everyone in this church went out and started saying- we are part of TCBC and we are heralding God's Word and we are on the front lines of ministry and you need to be in this church praying for it, supporting it and defending it. If everyone in this church went out and took this stand, we would have to build tomorrow. Unfortunately, there are those who sit around and watch others waging the war for the Church of God. That is the way it was for Samson. He is fighting the Philistines alone and Israel is just watching him fight.

Samson liked riddles, so in **verse 16** he made up another one. It is interesting that in Hebrew the word for "donkey" is hamor and the word for "heap" is homer. Samson says I have heaped up dead bodies with the jawbone of a donkey. Samson named the place "Ramath-lehi," which means "jawbone hill."

NEGATIVE CIRCUMSTANCE #3 – God sovereignly provided for Samson when he called out to Him in Lehi through the negative circumstance of Samson's personal need. **15:18-20**

At the end of this fight Samson was emotionally and physically drained. Those who never go to war for God or His Word against this world do not know how fatiguing it is. They have no clue. But when you have been to war for God, it is draining. Eleazer was completely weary after he won a victory against the Philistines (II Sam. 23:9-10); Elijah was completely drained after he killed the false prophets of Baal (I Kings 19:4-5). When you go to war for God, it does drain you.

Samson was very thirsty and he called to the Lord for help and the Lord helped him. In **verse 18**, this is the only time we find Samson praying. He needed help and he prayed. The prayer is intriguing because it does show us that he knew exactly where this victory had come from; it had come from God.

God split or opened up "the hollow place" (**verse 19**) in Lehi so water came out just for Samson. That word "hollow place" refers to a deep bowl type of place. Samson named it "En-hakkore" which means "callers spring." Samson had called out to God and God answered and produced this freshwater spring.

When you read **verse 20** we learn that this one victory gave Israel stability for twenty years. This point is again repeated in 16:20.

Samson is often criticized as being very emotional, but think about this. He lost his wife, he lost the support of the nation Israel, he lost his freedom and yet he kept his focus on the enemy and used every one of those situations to go on the offensive. He did not sit around and mope and whine and question God. He did a job for God.