

June 25, 2017

Lesson 4: Judges 13: 1-7, 24-25

Samson Answers the Call

### **Context:**

Our scripture lesson today focuses on the story of Samson, one of the most famous judges because his story reads almost like that of a comic book hero or action adventure movie. But it is also a tragic story, one where we meet the flawed hero who experiences a great downfall. Samson has been immortalized in VBS curriculums, art, and even the outside world where women who are temptresses are referred to as “Delilahs.”

However, the story of Samson begins with the fact that he is a man of God. His birth narrative follows other miraculous conception stories where the mother is barren and then her womb is opened to give birth to a child that will save or lead their people. There are conditions though about how they will be raised. In this case, the child will be a Nazirite, one who is dedicated to God. Nazirites were like a priestly warrior clan of sorts. They could not drink wine and they could only eat clean food. Their head and body hair were to never be cut. They were to be completely pure and preserved in the state they were born. Samson is to be groomed for success in leading God’s people.

But as we’ve seen in the book of Judges, things never go as a planned. Samson is one of those judges and is raised to be pure and holy with no razor every touching his hair. But in his adventures, he veers from the rules of the Nazirites and his great downfall leads to another collapse in the leadership of Israel.

Samson’s story is not unique to the Bible. In the ancient world, there were many stories in the Near East where men of great strength would almost be godlike until some a misstep was made and they found themselves in peril. In the midst of such a story is a usually a moral takeaway. The flawed hero dies redeemed by some action in which they give of themselves and those hearing it learn something about themselves.

In the case of Samson, his misstep comes in his desire for women who are not Israelites. In the ancient world it was common for ancient people to intermarry between tribes. In fact, it often helped build alliances and united enemy tribes. But in the case of the judges and Israelites, it spells disaster as the people lose their identity and their dedication to Yahweh, the one God they are to worship. Samson’s story is one where we hear the writers warn the people of forgetting who they worship and who they are to be as God’s covenant people. In their world, intermarriage is one of those things that can lead them away from only worshipping and following Yahweh. In the end of his story, Samson is redeemed for his dedication to returning to God, even though it costs him his life in the process. He is still a judge called by God to lead God’s people and one who sought to protect them all the way to the very end of his life.

### **Application:**

While other commentators might focus on Samson’s lust and how it led to his downfall, I am more attentive to the fact that Samson was chosen by God and even to his dying breath, gave all that he had to honor that call. Samson, like all of us, was human.

He was a living, breathing person with a heartbeat who had dreams and desires. He was the son of parents who raised him the best they could and he even fought many a battle using his ferocious strength to defend God's people and even trick those who sought to destroy them.

Even in the bad romance with Delilah, Samson did not give his secret until pressured into the: "If you love me, you'll do this" line that even many teenagers and adults have to deal with today in relationships. And he made a mistake. Yes, it cost him his status and his position. And yes, he died a painful death that was the result of that decision he made to reveal his innermost secret. But through it all, he sought to honor God and even felt the remorse of his mistake.

To me Samson is still a hero. His story is our story. We all have our trials and temptations and times where we've been sweet-talked. But God can use our story and we are not to be defined by those mistakes or those sins of the past. In fact, they can make us better teachers and better leaders. People can hear our stories and be reminded they aren't alone.

They usually pop up in times when we least expect it. It may not be the stories we hear from the pulpit or the classroom, but in the conversation in the grocery line or the call from a friend where they don't know what direction to turn. In my own life, I have been amazed at dinners or outings where mentors or other adults share stories with me that I don't think they've shared with others. Sometimes it comes as something they've needed to process or seemed to know that I needed to discuss, but didn't know who to turn to. In hearing them open up, I realized it is ok to make mistakes and that at times to see them as learning experiences. It is ok to have experiences where you reflect and see things from a different view point where you learned something about yourself or need reflections about different areas of your life. All in all, the vulnerability to share life together makes me realize that we are never alone as we may feel.

The text doesn't say that Samson had anyone to talk to when he was at the Temple feast with the Philistines after being stripped and blinded, But I would like to imagine that somehow he knew he wasn't alone. Perhaps a compassionate pat from a servant or a memory of his hometown friends and parents flooded his mind as he prayed to the Lord. He was born a child of God and died a child of God. The same goes for us. We are born children of God and will die as children of God. And may we be reminded we are never alone no matter what we've gone through or what we have done. There are others with us and God is with us too.

Evan Hunter Pugh  
Associate Pastor of FUMC Dothan

First United Methodist Church Dothan  
1380 West Main Street  
Dothan, AL 36301  
[hunter@fumcdothan.org](mailto:hunter@fumcdothan.org)