

Samson: Wasted Potential – Judges 13-16

I. INTRODUCTION – RR – 1 John 2:15-17

A. Set Up

1. The Israelites & Philistines arrived in Canaan at about the same time.
2. While Israel invaded from the Eastern wilderness with millions, the Philistines arrived from the Western Sea with a few thousand.
 - a. They found the coast virtually empty,
 - b. And quickly set up several outposts.
3. The Philistines were decades *ahead* of Israel in terms of technology & their settlements grew rapidly.
4. It was inevitable that as Israel pressed west & Philistia grew east that they would eventually meet.
5. The only question was who would win the ensuing conflict.

B. 40 Years of Oppression

1. 13:1 tells us the Philistines were the winners & that they dominated Israel for 40 years.
 - a. But we learn the *reason* they won was *not* because of their superior technology & weapons.

1 Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

- b. The Philistines were allowed to defeat & oppress Israel because *God permitted* it.
 - c. Israel had once again turned from Him to worship idols, so God used the Philistines as the rod of correction on his erring people.
 - d. After 40 years of harsh oppression, Israel finally turned back to God.
2. It's seems *most people* have no time for God until they're in trouble.
 - a. They live their lives without a thought for the Almighty while the sun is shining & everything is rosy.
 - 1) But when life throws a curve and they find themselves on their backs staring up at dark clouds,
 - 2) Then they cry out for help to who or whatever might be

beyond those clouds.

- b. Usually, it takes a major set-back before a man or woman will turn to God.
 - 1) But this makes sense when we remember that the essence of sin is the desire for independence from Him.
 - 2) As long as we can maintain the fiction that we're the captain of our own ship, the master & commander of our own destiny, we give Him hardly a thought.
 - 3) But when life turns over on us, when the wind blows, the levee breaks, the flood rises, or the earth moves, we're quickly brought to the realization that we *are* dependent on God.
 - 4) Are lives are in *His* hand, not our own.
 3. This is the way it was with Israel – when things were going well, they gave God little thought & wandered off into sin.
 4. So God applied what measures *were necessary* to bring them back. In this case, it was the Philistine oppression of the Land.
 5. What God did for Israel, He does for us too. He applies what means are necessary to remind us of our dependence on Him.
- A LESSON: If you want to avoid trouble – KEEP yourself dependent on the Lord.
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6. One of the tragedies of this story is *how long* it took before Israel came to her sense & turned back to God. V. 1 says they lived under oppression for *40 years!*
 - a. This is by far the longest period of foreign oppression in the book of Judges.
 - b. And it challenges us with searching question –
 - c. How long will *we* endure trouble before *we* turn to God – both individually & as a nation?
 - 1) How many more hurricanes will it take before we fall to our knees and confess that we've rejected Him?
 - 2) How many more blows must our economy suffer before we fall on our faces admitting we've sent Him away as we've run after the idols of greed & pleasure?
 - 3) What's next? Earthquakes on the West Coast – drought in the heartland, more terrorist attacks, plague?

II. TEXT

A. God Sends a Deliverer

1. After 40 years, God sent relief to Israel in the form of a deliverer named *Samson*.
2. But Samson was a bit different from the previous Judges He'd sent.
 - a. They'd been *rulers*.
 - b. The Judges usually began by leading Israel in a military conquest over their oppressors.
 - c. Then, once liberation was secured, the judge became a peace-time *civil* ruler.
 - d. A few of the judges *only* served in the civil capacity, they never led the army of Israel.
 - e. But the point is, they *all* appear to have served as *civil rulers*.
3. Samson never took that role. He was never a leader, either militarily or civilly.
 - a. He was a one-man wrecking crew!
 - b. He was a guy so out of control he just spread mayhem everywhere he went.
 - c. He was a bit like a wild wind-up toy God let loose among the Philistines to bring down chaos & destruction on them.
4. We'll cover Samson's story in greater depth when we get back from Israel.
5. But today we'll hit some of the highlights of his life. Let's begin with his birth.

B. 13:2-5

² Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. ³ And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. ⁴ Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or *similar* drink, and not to eat anything unclean. ⁵ For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

1. Manoah & his wife had no children – she was barren.
2. But one day the Lord appeared to her & told her she would have a son who would bring deliverance to Israel.
3. She was told that even while the child was growing inside her, he was dedicated to God as a *Nazarite*.
4. Now, this has nothing to do with the village of Nazareth where Jesus grew up.
5. The word “Nazarite” comes from a word meaning *to separate*.
6. Something that was “nazar” had been *consecrated*; removed from common use & reserved solely for a special function.
7. In Numbers 6, God has shown a way by which some could give themselves to Him for a time of *special devotion*. It was called the vow of the Nazarite.
 - a. The vow usually lasted for from a few months to a year.
 - b. During this time, they would yield themselves to the Lord to be used by Him in whatever He chose.
 - c. They would spend time in meditating in the Word & prayer,
 - d. Then they would respond to whatever their study & prayer showed them they ought to do.
8. In order to *maximize their availability* to be used by God, 3 prohibitions were given the Nazarite. We find them here in vs. 2-5 in the instructions to Samson’s mother.
 - 1) They were to drink no wine.
 - 2) They were to avoid contact with anything unclean, especially the dead.
 - 3) They were not to cut their hair.
9. Now, these seem like rather strange requirements for showing dedication to God until we remember what the Nazarite vow was **FOR**.
 - a. It aimed at making a person *available* to be *used* by God.
 - b. The prohibitions simply *safeguarded* that availability.

C. No Wine

1. The prohibition against wine was to keep the mind clear; free of any influence that would distract it from the truth.
2. The main battleground between God & the devil is the mind of man.
3. This is why the Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:2 that we must not be conformed to this world, but rather, transformed by the

renewing of our minds.

4. A mind clouded by the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil is an unfit tool for God.
5. Just as alcohol can distort a person's thought-life, the mind can be seduced & distracted by *other* influences;
 - a. Like lust, greed, envy, anger, & hatred.
 - b. All of these can corrupt our thoughts as surely as a fifth of whiskey.
6. For the believer, being sober-minded means more than just not being inebriated.
7. It means being free of *any* influence that would dominate our thoughts.
8. Have you met people who are so excited about something it's all they seem capable of thinking or talking about?
 - a. They're *intoxicated*, not with alcohol, but with some *mental fascination* that has completely captured their attention.
 - b. Forrest Gump's friend Bubba was intoxicated with shrimp.
 - c. I've met people who were totally under the influence of Rock music, cars, guns, coins, dolls, fishing, computers.
 - d. Their whole lives were lived in reference to some dominating affections.
9. The Nazarite had to stay mentally-balanced & clear-headed so he wasn't to drink any wine – but not just that, Num. 6 says he wasn't to partake of *anything* of the vine!
 - a. Grapes, grape juice, and raisins were *off-limits*.
 - b. Why? If all God was concerned about was the *effect* of alcohol, why prohibit grapes & the rest?
10. In that time, everyone made their own wine.
 - a. They would crush grapes to extract the juice, then would put the juice in skins where it would ferment and produce wine.
 - b. Different pressings produced lots of wineskins, each one at a *different* stage of fermentation.
 - c. By looking at a bag, you had little knowledge of how much alcohol it contained, no one could see how potent the wine inside.
 - d. So the question was, "Where do we draw the line regarding the consumption of alcohol?"
 - e. God drew that line *for them* – He didn't leave it to them to

- discover.
- f. He drew the line at the beginning so that no one would then start quibbling over what the word “grape” or “wine” really means.
 - g. He said, “Stay away from *the vine*.”
 - h. If one takes grapes out of their diet, then they never have to worry about violating the ban on wine!
11. The lesson for us is this -- As it regards sin & temptation, stay *way back* from it.
- a. Draw the line on what you permit yourself well away from sin.
 - b. Don't even *start* down the path toward moral failure. Don't even go there.
12. Believers will ask, “Can I drink? How many drinks can I have before it's sin?”
- a. “What's permissible for a Christian?”
 - b. “How far can a man & woman go in physical affection before it's sin?”
13. The answer is right here –
- a. How available to God do you want to be?
 - b. What are you devoted to: God or a bottle?
 - c. Who's touch is more important to you: The Lord's or this other person's?
14. If you're asking what's *permissible*, what you can get away with,
- a. Instead of where's a wise place to draw the line so you can *remain available* to the Lord,
 - b. Then your heart's not where it should be, and *that's* what you need to deal with.

D. Nothing Unclean

1. The Nazarite was also to avoid contact with anything unclean, especially dead bodies.
2. By unclean, I don't mean dirty or contaminated things.
 - a. “Unclean” referred to things that were *not* to be a part of the diet or lifestyle of the people of God.
 - b. Because God is holy, His people must also be holy.
 - c. To teach them this, God divided things into two categories, the clean & the unclean.
 - d. The call to holiness meant they must *learn to distinguish*

- between** these two columns & chose to live in a place approved by Him.
- e. Contact with the unclean rendered someone unfit to approach God or to be used by Him.
 - f. They would have to go through an elaborate ritual of purification before they could **return** a place of fellowship with the Lord & usefulness to Him.
3. The Nazarite vow was a commitment to stay away from all contact with the unclean – no matter how pressing the need.
- a. You see, sometimes a person would **HAVE** to touch a dead body and become unclean.
 - b. If a relative died, they would have to move the body and prepare it for burial.
 - c. If they owned an animal that died, they'd have to bury it.
 - d. But for the length of a Nazarite vow – they were **exempt** from even these most basic demands.
4. Being devoted to the Lord, sitting at His beckon call, they had to be ready **in an instant** to do what He wanted them to do.
5. There's a division of the Air Force called the SAC - *Strategic Air Command*.
- a. The pilots in SAC live in rotations of duty in which when they're on they sit in their barracks near the hangars where their planes are waiting to scramble.
 - b. At the first hint of warning, they takeoff and assume position, waiting for the order to launch their deadly payloads.
 - c. When these pilots are on duty, they wear their flight suits & know exactly where their gear is.
 - d. They engage in nothing that would cause a second's hesitation should the alarm sound.
6. That's what the prohibition against contact with the unclean meant to a Nazarite.
- a. Uncleanness would render him unfit to answer God's summons.
 - b. So he kept himself pure & was **vigilant** to **remain** so.
 - c. **Carelessness** was incompatible with the Nazarite mindset.
7. What this teaches us is the sense of **carefulness** we need to bring to our walk.
- a. While there are many wonderful delights & pleasures God has placed in the physical creation for us to enjoy,

- b. We also live in a *fallen world* that holds forth plenty temptations that if pursued would render us unfit to be used by God.
 - c. If we yielded to those temptations, they would blow our witness & fill us with a guilt that would cripple us, stealing the spiritual power we need to be effective for the Lord.
9. The call to holiness is no less potent for Christians today than it was for ancient Israel.
- a. In fact, it's even *more applicable* because we enjoy something they didn't –
 - b. The inner presence of the *Holy* Spirit.
10. John warns believers about the *urgency* to not get caught up in the world's corruption when in 1 John 2 he says . . .

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

11. In James 4:4 we read . . .

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

12. This is something we *especially*, need to pay attention to.
- a. Living in affluent modern America where there is little if any real persecution for being a believer,
 - b. It's easy to slap the label “Christian” on *a worldly lifestyle*.
 - c. In an age when one of the best-selling books is a Christian title, *Your Best Life Now*, many think they can be the *friend of God* while at the same time buddying up to the world.
13. James & John are clear, if we are to be the people of God, then we cannot be people of this world, living by its values, fashions & priorities.

E. No Haircut

1. The third requirement for the Nazarite was that they weren't allowed to cut their hair.

2. When the vow was over, they would shave their head & offer the hair as a burnt offering.
3. Now, this seems a rather strange requirement. Why would God make such a rule as this a sign of devotion?
4. Contrary to the modern idea that men in the ancient world had long hair, they wore their hair short.
 - a. In fact, the length of hair was an important ***cultural distinction*** between the sexes.
 - b. Women generally wore their hair long while men kept it short.
 - c. Short hair was more practical for men when it came to both work and battle.
 - 1) Long hair presented a danger when it came to manual labor.
 - 2) And it didn't fit inside a helmet when he went to battle.
 - 3) So men kept their hair short.
5. The Nazarite prohibition on cutting hair was meant to reinforce the idea that during the length of the vow, the Nazarite was not engaged in normal labor.
 - a. He was devoting himself to a special season of availability to the Lord.
 - b. As his hair grew, it marked him to the eyes of others as someone whose commitment to the Lord was manifest in his appearance; ***he stood out***.
6. Since long hair on men is so common ***today***, we can't relate to this.
 - a. Those who are my age and older will remember what a scandal the Beatles created when they first became popular in the US.
 - b. Crew cuts were the standard in those days.
 - c. But the Beatles had hair that actually covered their EARS!!!!
 - d. The entire adult population was scandalized!
 - e. And when teenage boys across the nation began growing out their hair in emulation of the boys from Liverpool, adults declared the ***end of civilization***.
 - f. Soon long hair had become a popular fashion that marked someone as being into rock & roll. Hair was the badge of a generation.
7. This is the way it went in the ancient world.
 - a. While men didn't sport crew cuts, they did keep their hair ***much shorter*** than women.

- b. A man with *long hair* stood out, and in Israel, it was understood he'd taken a Nazarite vow.
- 8. The spiritual application is that as we follow God, there ought to be changes in our lifestyle that identify us as belonging to Him.
 - a. Our loyalty to God ought to be reflected in what we wear, where we go, what we do.
 - b. While we don't have to put a bumper sticker on our foreheads saying, "I'm a Christian" –
 - c. Others ought to recognize a difference in us as they observe our daily lives.

F. Samson's Mother

1. The Lord told Samson's mother the child growing within her was already a Nazarite & would remain so till the day of his death.
3. So she must not drink any alcohol or come into contact with anything unclean, because it would effect her unborn son.
4. And from the day of his birth, his hair was not to be cut, ever!

G. Samson's Failure

1. With this as our background, we launch into the story of Samson.
2. Many years pass and Samson grows into a young man.
3. And though he's *supposed* to be someone devoted to God, he proved to be about as wayward & willful as they come.
4. One day he got the hots for a Philistine woman & demanded his parents arrange a wedding.
5. As they all traveled to her village, Samson wandered into a *vineyard*, of all places, & was attacked by a lion.
6. The Spirit of God came on him & he tore the thing apart bare-handed!
7. Some time later, he decided to take a look at what had become of the lion's carcass, so he again entered the vineyard.
9. In 14:8-9 we read -

⁸ After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. ⁹ He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

- a. Samson not only violated the prohibition against *touching* the dead,
 - b. He *smashed* it altogether by eating honey found in the carcass.
 - c. This is just nasty-gross & about as shocking a violation of his Nazarite vow as could be made.
10. What's even more unnerving is to see *where* this took place - in a *vineyard*!
- a. What was Samson, a Nazarite, doing in a vineyard?
 - b. Bees make honey from pollen, which these bees would have gathered from the vines.
 - c. Samson shows *little regard for the guidelines* that are supposed to define his life.
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11. Remember that the prohibition against wine was so that the Nazarite would be free of any mental influence that would weaken his usefulness to God.
12. Samson may not have had a problem with alcohol, but he sure did have a problem with lust.
- a. 14:1-2

¹ Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. ² So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

b. 16:1

Now Samson went to Gaza [A major Philistine city] and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

c. 16:4

Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

- 13. This was *another* Philistine stronghold
- 14. What's a man who's supposed to be set apart to God doing spending so much time hanging out in the territory of the enemy?
- 15. And why is he so attracted to the world?
- 16. Finally, we have the story of Delilah persuading Samson to reveal the secret of his great strength which she then used to trap & destroy him.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Lessons Form Samson

1. As I said earlier, we'll go into greater depth on Samson's story and the lessons we can learn from it on the 12th of Oct.
2. But as we end this morning, I want to concentrate on just one thing – how Samson stands as a stunning example of *wasted potential*.
3. This was a guy who'd been singled out by God for a special work even before he was born.
 - a. His parents raised him with a sense of divine destiny.
 - b. They were careful to groom him with the awareness that he was *called to be different*.
 - c. His diet, lifestyle, & appearance were all meant to remind him he was called by God to a special work.
 - d. But Samson did just about everything in his power to try to fit in with the world instead of His calling.
4. God knew what kind of man Samson would be.
 - a. He knew what struggles Samson would face, what temptations would bring him down –
 - b. That's precisely *why* God called him to be a Nazarite.
5. The vow was supposed to *help* him *resist* those things that would destroy him if he gave in to them.

The call to holiness & obedience to God is **FOR US** – *to protect us!*
6. Even though Samson's personal life was so messed up, God still used him to break the Philistine domination of Israel.
 - a. The Spirit of God came upon him again & again to bring about Israel's liberation.
 - b. God even used *Samson's poor choices* as an occasion to deal with the Philistines.
 - c. But none of that excused Samson's rebellion & sin.
 - d. Though God will even make the *evil of man* to serve His purposes, it never justifies the evil that man does.
7. God used Samson because God is good & gracious & uses imperfect vessels to do His perfect work.
8. But in Samson we see that even while God is using us to bring deliverance and blessing to others, *we may ourselves miss out*.
9. We read that the Spirit of God came on Samson 5 times in chs. 13-16.
10. But his story teaches us that an outpouring of the Spirit does not automatically make us *more godly*.

- a. It gives us the *resources* to be holy, but it doesn't "do it to us."
- b. A person can be wonderfully *gifted* by the Holy Spirit & at the same time he/she can be very spiritually immature.

B. Wasted Potential

1. Chances are good there's someone here today who's been called by God as Samson was.
2. There's a call on your life to play a significant role in what God wants to do in the world.
3. You've always sensed some larger purpose and the awareness that God has set a special destiny & mission before you.
4. But your battle with the world & the flesh has always gotten the best of you.
5. There have been moments in your life when things were so clear & you knew God was using you, but those seasons were short lived and quickly drowned in failure.
6. Samson was used by God to bless others, but because of his selfish willfulness, he himself missed out on the blessing of God.
7. Don't follow Samson's example.
8. Give you heart, mind, & body to the Lord.