

# The Ungodly Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Judges 16, Samson and Delilah.

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. The people of Gaza were told, Samson is here. So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate.

They made no move during the night, saying, At dawn will kill him. But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all.

He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. Sometime later, he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so that we may tie him up and subdue him.

[ 1 : 11 ] Each one of us will give you 1,100 shekels of silver. So Delilah said to Samson, Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.

Samson answered her, If anyone ties me with seven fresh bow strings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man. Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bow strings that had not been dried, and she tied him with them.

With men hidden in the room, she called to him, Samson, the Philistines are upon you. But he snapped the bow strings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame.

So the secret of his strength was not discovered. Then Delilah said to Samson, You have made a fool of me. You have lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied.

He said, If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man. So Delilah took new ropes and tied them with them.

[ 2 : 13 ] Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, Samson, the Philistines are upon you. But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads. Delilah then said to Samson, All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me.

Tell me how you can be tied. He replied, If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man.

So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids off his head, wove them into the fabric and tightened it with the pin. Again she called to him, Samson, the Philistines are upon you.

He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom with the fabric. Then she said to me, How can you say I love you when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength.

With such nagging, she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it. So he told her everything. No razor has ever been used on my head, he said.

[ 3 : 20 ] Because I have been a Nazarite dedicated to God from my mother's womb, if my head were shaved, my strength would leave me and I would become as weak as any other man. When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, Come back once more.

He has told me everything. So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair.

And so he began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, Samson, the Philistines are upon you. He awoke from his sleep and thought, I'll go out as before and shake myself free.

But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding the corn in the prison.

But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. The death of Samson. Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their god, and to celebrate, saying, Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.

[ 4 : 38 ] When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, Our god has delivered our enemy, into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain. While they were in their high spirits, they shouted, Bring out Samson to entertain us.

So they called Samson out of prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.

Now the temple was crowded with men and women. All the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about 3,000 men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the Lord, Sovereign Lord, remember me.

Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me, with one blow, get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes. Then Samson reached towards the two central pillars on which the temple stood.

Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers, and all the people in it.

[ 5 : 55 ] Thus he killed many more when he died than when he lived. Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zora and Ishtel?

Not sure. In the tomb of Mano, his father. He had led Israel for 20 years. This is the word of God. Victoria, thanks Martin, thanks the band for leading and leading us in our worship.

Let me pray for us now. Father, we thank you for the story. We thank you for your word. Father, we pray that what is helpful would be remembered, and what is unhelpful be forgotten.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, whip me, you devils, from the possession of this heavenly sight. Blow me about in winds.

Roast me in sulfur. Wash me in steep down gulfs of liquid fire. O Desdemona, Desdemona, dead. Oh, oh.

[ 7 : 03 ] Well, if you're an arts graduate, you'd recognize those lines from the play Othello. And it's Shakespeare's great tragic play, isn't it? And you see, in many ways, Othello is incredibly impressive.

He's self-made. He's an outsider. He becomes the ultimate insider. He's a decorated war hero, a general. But beneath this incredible gifting lies great character flaws.

He's insanely jealous, and he has deep insecurities. And the Bible's word for these flaws is sin and ungodliness.

And it is this ungodliness that works itself out in Othello's life and leads him to murder his own wife, Desdemona, in a fit of jealousy.

And maybe there's something in that story that you recognize in yourself. You might see in yourself, on the one hand, that you've got incredible gifts, great talents and privileges.

[ 8 : 08 ] But on the other hand, you see some areas of your life where there is great sin and ungodliness that threaten, like maggots, to gobble up your future and your life.

Well, if you're new here this evening, our normal pattern is to work through Bible book, book by book, bit by bit. But from time to time, we look at a thematic series.

And at the moment, we've jumped into the middle of the series, and we're looking at a thematic series called The Living Church. And what we've been doing is, we've been looking at Sunday by Sunday, what it is to be church.

So over the past Sundays, we've considered that we need to be a cross and word-centered church. Then we considered that we need to be a loving church. And then we considered how we need to be waging spiritual warfare, that we shouldn't be lazy, and that as a church, we should expect persecution.

And this evening, we're considering how to be godly at a church, because godliness matters. You see, the reason for this is that godliness is never a private matter.

[ 9 : 19 ] Now, that's the devil's great lie. Godliness and ungodliness is always a public thing. You see, sin and ungodliness always expands and spreads like gangrene and works itself out, affecting all the areas of our life and those around us.

And ultimately, sin and ungodliness seeks to destroy us. And that's the great lesson of Othello. Othello's sin and ungodliness, despite his enormous gifts, spreads and works itself out, destroying him and those around him that he loves most.

You see, godliness matters. And so from one tragic character to another, let's look at the story of Samson and see what Samson has to teach us about pursuing godliness over gifts within the local church.

And if you're taking notes there, our first point is Samson, a tragically flawed servant. So by way of context, context, in chapter 15, we considered how Samson is at his greatest.

We see Samson at his greatest in chapter 15. Physically, he's at his greatest. He picks up a jawbone of a donkey and he slaughters a thousand Philistines by himself, single-handedly.

[ 10 : 47 ] And then spiritually, he's at his greatest. No sooner has he won this great victory and delivered the Israelites, then he gives glory to God. In 15 verse 18, he says, you have given your servant this great salvation.

But having seen Samson at his greatest and at his best, in this chapter, this evening, we're seeing Samson at his worst. So I wonder if you'll look down with me at verse 16, verse 1, chapter 16, verse 1.

One day, Samson went into Gaza where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. You see, as impressive as Samson is, he has a tragic flaw. Samson is governed by his eyes. He sees something, he wants it, he grasps it, and he takes it.

He has ultimate self-confidence. in himself. He's enormously and impressively gifted, but he is not godly. Samson lives for himself.

[ 11 : 57 ] And so when Samson falls in love with a Philistine, Delilah, in our chapter, the Philistines whom God's people were meant to conquer and subdue and not marry, the Philistines are quick to pounce on their enemy, Samson.

So join with me in looking down in verse 4 and 5 there. So sometime later, he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah.

The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, see if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so that we may tie him up and subdue him.

Each one of us will give you 1,100 shekels of silver. And well, like attracts like. Delilah, she's a woman of the world.

She's Jenny from the block. She's all about what she can get. And she's not subtle about it, is she? So look at verse 6. So Delilah said to Samson, Samson, tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.

[ 13 : 13 ] You see Samson here, he's so full of pride and self-confidence that he isn't fazed and he simply tricks her. And they end up playing this little game, Samson, the Philistines are upon you.

The basic premise of the game is Samson lies to Delilah and then he smashes up some Philistines afterwards. But Delilah in Samson has met his match.

And so she's persistent and so persistent that eventually in 15 and 16, verse 15 and 16, how can you say I love you when you weren't confined in me?

This is the third time you've made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength. And with such nagging and she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

Samson relents and he tells her the secret of his great strength. So verse 17 there. So he told her everything.

[ 14 : 17 ] No razor has ever been used on my head, he said to her, because I have been a Nazarite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me and I would become as weak as any other man.

And you can almost hear the collective groan and gasp of the readers and listeners to this true story. Samson, what are you doing, you muppet?

You're a lunatic. You see, everyone sees the foolishness and folliness of this except for Samson. And that's the thing about sin, isn't it?

We fool ourselves that we're in control and immune to the effects of it when it is so obvious to everyone else around us that we are in great danger.

And while Samson in his pride and self-confidence, he is betrayed by Delilah. But it's not just that Samson is betrayed, but that his ungodliness and his sin has finally worked itself out in his life.

[15:28] You see, Samson sees his strength as something that belongs to him by right, not for what it is, a gift of God for which he should be thankful.

And I wonder how many of us here can identify with that. We've been given many great gifts, so we've been given a good upbringing, a nice place to live, a university education.

We're nice people, and we see these as all parts of who we are and not for what they are, a gift from God for which we should be thankful.

And so instead, we use these good gifts to pursue ungodly lives, putting ourselves first as number one. But I wonder if you notice what led Samson to this.

So look down and see where he places his confidence in verse 20. And then she called, Samson, the Philistines are upon you. He woke up from his sleep and thought, I'll go out as before and shake myself free.

[16:40] See, Samson places his confidence in himself, doesn't he? It's Samson the great, Samson the powerful, Samson who has saved himself before, who's conquered all these Philistines, who's going to save himself again.

And it's a very different response to the Samson that we saw in chapter 15. Samson at his best who cries out to God and ascribes victory to God.

Now, here's the thing. So in Hebrew literature, it's incredibly rare to see a character's thoughts. And so where it says in our passage and thought, I'll go out as before and shake myself free, you can be absolutely sure that the author is making a point there.

And the point is this, that Samson's ungodliness, his self-worship, led to his downfall. And he did not know that the Lord had left him.

The end of verse 20. He is spiritually blind to the danger that he is in. And here's the nutmeg. It's not that God has abandoned Samson.

[18:00] Oh, no, no, no, no. It is just the opposite. It's because God has loved Samson so much that he has not abandoned him to his sin.

See, God is so zealous for your holiness, for your godliness, that you might not shipwreck your faith through ungodliness, that he will act and stop at nothing to bring you back to himself, no matter what the cost.

Your job, your livelihood, your health, your happiness, your friendships, whatever it takes, he's going to bring you back to himself that you don't wreck your life through ungodliness.

You see, all glory belongs to God and he will not share it. Whenever we look to glorify ourselves, that is sin and God won't tolerate it.

So Samson's spiritual blindness leads to physical blindness and where he was in bondage to sin, he is physically bonded with bronze shackles and where he was enslaved to ungodliness, he is physically enslaved.

[19:09] So verse 21 there, Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They took him down to Gaza, binding him with bronze shackles. They set him to grinding grain in the prison.

You see, Samson confused being spiritually empowered with great strength to being spiritually transformed. He sees the great gift that God has spiritually given him, empowering him, as a sign that he is spiritually right with God and that therefore it doesn't matter how he behaves.

And maybe that's true for you. We might see the gifts that God gives us and we see them as a sign that we are spiritually right with God.

Yes, there might be one area of my life that's out of control, but God doesn't mind. He still blesses me. He still gives me lots of good things. And we self-justify ourselves, don't we?

I attend small group. I know all the studies, all the answers at my Bible study group. At least I'm not so bad as so-and-so. But we forget that God asks for our obedience and not for our sacrifices in all areas of our life.

[20:29] And that was the lesson that Samson had to learn that merely because he had a gift was not a mark that he was automatically right with God and free to use and abuse that gift however he

wanted.

And here's the thing about Samson. You see, it is very easy for us to sit here on Sunday evening and hear all about this and say, well, that's not me. I'm different. I'm not like Samson.

I'll get it right. I'm okay with God. God will love me irrespective of how I behave and godliness and obedience, well, they don't really matter that much.

But to think that is to miss the entire point of the story and the whole book, the point of the book of Judges. And here's our second point.

Samson is a mirror for our hearts. You see, the great temptation for us is as we look to a leader in life or whatever situation it is, that we look for someone who's impressive, who sounds impressive, who seems enormously spiritually empowered, but who is not hardly godly.

[ 21 : 39 ] You see, a good leader is a great gift from God. And I hope you'll know the truth of that, won't you? Maybe you've experienced that. Maybe you've had a good father or a good teacher at school or a good boss at some point.

But the converse is true as well and that bad leaders are a sign of God's judgment on the ungodliness of his people.

And that is the whole point of the book of Judges. Well, what do I mean? So here's how the author introduces the book of Judges in chapter 2.

I brought you up out of Egypt. I led you into the land I swore to give your ancestors, God said. I will never break my covenant with you and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land but you shall break down their altars yet you have disobeyed me.

Why have you done this? Despite having all the privileges, all the blessings in the world, you still went astray. And what's the repeated refrain that we hear throughout Judges?

[ 22 : 48 ] The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and they forgot the Lord their God and they served the Baals and the Asherahs. And so throughout the book of the Judges we see the people crying out to God in their misery from their sin and God delivers them despite themselves by raising up Judges.

And by Judges it doesn't mean someone with a wig and a gavel. He's talking about a warlord who's going to rescue them from the people who have opposed them. And these Judges throughout this book as the people get more and more dysfunctional in their sin the Judges become more and more dysfunctional.

And so the last four chapters of the book after Samson just falls into absolute carnage. Most of us which wouldn't be polite to talk about in church it becomes such a sad picture of what sin and ungodliness does in our lives.

And so the book ends in those days Israel had no king and everyone did as they saw fit. And the challenge of the book to us becomes clear is how far is far enough?

What will it take for us as a people to see the horror of our sin and to turn to God in repentance and trust?

[ 24 : 14 ] What will it take? When is enough enough? And so our third point then is Samson who points to a better judge the true king.

Now if Judges shows us the horror of our ungodliness it also shows us how we can be godly and not through what we do but by following a king who saves us from ungodliness.

So when Samson is at his weakest and physically blind God gives him spiritual sight to pray in faith and so we read there in verse 28 of Judges 16 then Samson prayed to the Lord sovereign Lord remember me please God strengthen me just once more and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes and what happens despite all his sinfulness all his weakness all the wreckage and the life that he'd got himself into God hears him and saves him and so Samson becomes more of a rescuer in his humility and weakness and death through God than he ever was in his life and so Samson is listed amongst the heroes of the faith in Hebrews chapter 11 in the New Testament see God saves us even when we don't ask for it God saves us when we are hopeless and helpless and stuck in our sin in the wreckage of our lives that our sin is called when we are the furthest from God than we can ever imagine he sees our hearts and the depths of our depravity and our sin and ungodliness but he still chooses to save you if you simply come to him in faith you see by the time of Samson the Israelites as a people were so enslaved to their sin and they didn't even bother crying out to God in the misery of their suffering that the Philistines had called so God intercedes to save his people by sending Samson and so when Samson is born an angel appears

to his parents who are unable to give birth and says you'll become pregnant and have a son and he'll take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines but when the true and better judge the true king

Jesus is born an angel appeared to Joseph his father and says Mary will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from his sins I'm going to read for you just a bit from this book that we're taking this series from that talks about Jesus and how he points how Samson points to Jesus in this chapter so there are 12 judges in the book of Judges but really the whole book is about the coming true judge Jesus Christ Samson can pile up the dead but Jesus can raise the dead Samson has supernatural power and strength but Jesus is the true strong man who destroys the real opposition to Satan of Satan Samson is a faithless Nazarite but Jesus is the faithful son devoted to his father Samson sleeps with prostitutes

Jesus saves prostitutes the true Samson has come and we can find our hope in his perfect power of course finally our true Samson also suffered humiliation and death though unlike Samson he had only ever done what is right as we read of Jesus' final days we see that he too was bound and paraded in public mockery he too prayed before he died not for revenge though but for forgiveness for his enemies that they might be forgiven and most amazingly of all our true Samson's death didn't kill many but saved many this is the judge and savior that we need this is what we need in our churches the true Samson Jesus Christ who is strong enough and good enough to deal with all the sin and hopelessness and ungodliness in our lives we battle and struggle as Christians but there is one who is truly mighty who can help us and save us godliness matters because this is our king who gave us everything that we might have a future with him in heaven shall I close in prayer father we thank you for this word we thank you for this story of Samson

[ 29 : 21 ] Lord and we pray that you might work within us to become a people who love you who seek to know you better who yearn to be godly in every area in Jesus name Amen