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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

We are talking about Big Events of the Old Testament series. We have paused in the book of Judges to talk about some of these temporary leaders God used to provide some leadership for the nation of Israel after they entered into Canaan, before they entered a time when God gives them a king. Of course the story of Samson is a story you have heard all of your life. One of the first Bible stories I ever heard, of course, was about Samson. I don’t know about you, but I always used to picture Samson as some huge, built-up, bulked-up, he-man! I mean a guy that looked like Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Incredible Hulk all put together. The more I studied it, the more I am convinced he probably didn’t look like that at all, because the source of Samson’s strength was not his hair, the source of Samson’s strength was not his muscles, the source of Samson’s strength was the Holy Spirit of God, because of his commitment and his devotion. If he were a big, strong-looking kind of guy, he could have said, “I did this by my own might!” but it’s clear every time he did something requiring supernatural strength, it was the Spirit of God coming on him. So, today maybe you can picture Samson as just an ordinary looking guy. Maybe not a 98-pound weakling, but just an ordinary looking guy who, because of his commitment to God, received amazing power. The story of Samson really begins before chapter 14 and we’re just going to pick up with chapter 14, because it begins what I call “the downward slope” of his spiritual decline. Anytime you study an Old Testament character, you ought to look for principles to help you try to live the Christian life. I call these “The Steps on the Slippery Slope of Spiritual Defeat!” and I want you to see the steps he took downward.

1. He defied his parents

First is the first bad step he made as he defied his parents. He didn’t follow his parent’s wishes or commands.

Judges 14:1-3a. “Samson went down to Timnah and he saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and to his mother, ‘I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.’ His father and mother replied, ‘Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?’”

I want you to kind of circle those words “went down,” because it’s true geographically, but it’s also going to be true morally it’s going to be true mentally it’s going to be true spiritually. He’s going “down” from this point. Now, at this time in the history of Israel, God was very clear. He absolutely forbade them from marrying outside the Israeli tribes. He was making sure the nation of Israel and the people of Israel maintained their identity, their spiritual heritage in a land where there were all kinds of different people. So he said, “I want every Jewish boy to marry a Jewish woman. I want to make sure that every Jewish woman is married to a Jewish man.” And here is Samson going outside God’s plan and outside the plan of his parents. He goes off and he wants to marry a pagan woman—not just a pagan woman—but a *Philistine* woman. They were the worst enemy of the Israelites. Basically, that is even true among Jewish people today who really want to be true to what they believe is their Jewish heritage will only marry another Jew. When I was in the third grade at Floral City School, I can remember my very first girlfriend. Her name was Gail Thompson. She was “Little Miss Peanut Festival” that year for Floral City and I’ll tell you

what. She was a good-looking third grader. I just want you to know—and she was my girlfriend. The only problem was there was another boy in that class and he wanted her to be his girlfriend too. His name was Alan Silverman. We only had two Jewish families in all of Florala, Alabama. All of that year in the third grade Alan and I kind of fought over Gail. I’ll never forget the joy in my heart when a few months later Alan took me aside in the cloakroom and said, “Listen, David. You can have Gail because my mother told me I cannot marry a Gentile.” I said, “Thank God for God’s plan for the Jews!” Even as a child he was taught that’s what he was supposed to do by his parents. That’s exactly what Samson was taught by his parents, but he didn’t want to have anything to do with it. He disobeyed his parents.

Is there a New Testament principle we can extract from this? Look at 2 Corinthians 6:14. Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth and he says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers for what do righteousness and wicked have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” I believe it is God’s plan for every Christian man to marry a Christian woman. I think it is God’s plan for every Christian woman to marry a Christian man. This passage of scripture in the New Testament says a Christian is not to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. That is true absolutely of marriage but people have said that also may be true of business relationships. Be careful if you are a Christian and you get yoked together in business with a non-Christian. Many times you are headed for trouble. So, just be careful but for sure it is true of marriage. So, the first mistake he made his parents had a plan for him God had a plan for him and he defied their authority.

2. He defiled his body

Here’s the second downward step. Not only did he defy his parents but he also defiled his body. Samson was a Nazirite. He had taken a Nazirite vow. That has nothing to do with Jesus who was called the Nazarene—they are two totally different things. But in Numbers 6, we are told that if a person is totally dedicated to God they can take a Nazirite vow. This is what it meant. Number one it meant all of their life or during the period of their vow they would never drink strong drink. They would not even eat old grapes, it said. Number two, they would never have a razor come upon their hair for as long as they were committed to this vow and for many it was for life. The third requirement was a Nazirite could never ever touch any kind of dead body. Of course, he could never touch a human corpse. Neither could he touch the carcass of an animal. Having understood that this is the basis of the Nazirite vow let’s read chapter 14:6-9. If you didn’t know that, you would miss the fact that he defiled his body.

Judges 14:6-9. “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he neither told his father nor his mother what he had done. The he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her. Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them he had taken the honey from a lion’s carcass.”

Do you know why? Because they would immediately have said, “What are you doing even

touching the carcass of a dead animal? You have broken your vows!” Isn’t it sad that there are a lot of people today who break their vows to the Lord just to scoop out a little honey of pleasure in one place or another? That’s what Samson did. You might think that’s such a small, insignificant thing, but when you make a commitment to God, God takes it seriously! Samson made a vow to God and God took it seriously and he defiled his body. What’s the New Testament principle? Look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Do you know why you should not abuse your body with drugs and alcohol and tobacco and anything like that? Just because it’s a bad thing to do? No, I’ll tell you a good reason you shouldn’t do it—because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and you are to take care of it; because it is a spiritual act of devotion to care for your body! So to ingest and to introduce those dangerous, damaging things into your body is to defile the temple of the Holy Spirit! So be careful! That was one of the downward steps Samson took. It’s interesting to note what happened there. He used that little incident of scooping out the honey to make a riddle. He goes down to this place Timnah to have a big wedding feast for his new bride and in the process he gives all the men in the wedding party a riddle and apparently Samson was so taken with all kinds of garments and clothes and things that he said, “Okay, I’ll bet you 30 different changes clothes if you can answer this riddle.” In other words we’re talking a lot of money. The riddle is in verse 14 and now you and I know the answer. “Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.” We know the answer is honey out of a lion. They couldn’t figure out this riddle so these people went to his bride-to-be, his fiancée this Philistine woman, and they said “Listen. It’s going to break us. We can’t afford all this” so finally she wrangles it out of Samson and she tells her Philistine friends and they guess the riddle and it makes Samson so angry that he leaves his own wedding in anger. Later, he decides he wants to go back and claim his bride. The problem is her father thought he didn’t want her anymore so he gave her to somebody else. That just made Samson that much angrier! That leads to his third step on the slippery slope of spiritual decline.

3. He demanded revenge

Number three: He demanded revenge. He was a very vengeful type of man.

Judges 15:3-8. “Samson said to them, ‘This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them.’ So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails, lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves. When the Philistines asked, ‘Who did this?’ they were told, ‘Samson, the Timnite’s son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend. So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. Samson said to them, ‘Since you’ve acted like this, I won’t stop until I get my revenge on you.’ He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.”

Now later some of his own people are going to come and get him to agree with them to a trick

when they tie him up and then some more Philistines come to attack him.

Judges 15:15. "Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men."

Do you believe that? I absolutely believe that. A donkey's jawbone would be a long, curved, strong bone that had teeth still in it and in the hands of a man who was strong with the power of the Holy Spirit, he could swing that thing and kill as many as would approach him.

Judges 15:16. "Then Samson said, 'With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men.' When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi."

Ramath Lehi means "Jawbone Hill." In other words he sang a song that said, "He found his thrill On Jawbone Hill; He made his kill On Jawbone Hill." I want you to see that much of Samson's motive was pure revenge. They had mistreated him. They had done him wrong and he was going to get back at them.

What's the lesson we learn there? The Old Testament did teach a law called, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." In other words if somebody poked out your right eye, you could go and poke out their right eye but you could do no more. Samson not only was following that, but he did much more damage than damage was ever done to him. He extracted much more in his vengeance than ever had been done to him and how unlike the character and nature of God that is! It contrasts what Jesus said in Luke 6:31. We call this "The Golden Rule." He said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Is Samson doing that? No! Absolutely not! In fact, he's not only taking an eye for an eye, he's doing a lot worse damage. You say, "Well, now. In the Old Testament they did not have to do that. They didn't have to show kindness." Of course, they didn't have to but the more a person knew God, the more they showed kindness. There are many examples of grace and kindness even in the Old Testament.

Can you think of some? What about when Saul was the king and he had been throwing spears at David trying to kill him? When Saul and his army come to sleep in a cave where David and his men are and David wakes up while Saul is asleep. David has a dagger and could have killed him easily, but he didn't. He just cut off a piece of Saul's robe. David was living it out before Jesus ever taught it. "As you would that men should do unto you, do also to them." Do you remember the time the prophet, Elisha, was confronted with the Syrian army and God blinded the entire army? They were wandering around blind and Elisha leads them into the camp of the Israelites at a place called Dothan. The blind Syrian army was surrounded by the Israeli army and they could have killed them right there. Talk about an ambush! Instead, Elisha said, "No, let's feed them. Let's show them kindness." That is in the Old Testament. Why did Elisha do that? Because he lived out the rule long before Jesus ever spoke it "as you would that men should do unto you, do also unto them!" Do you know what the Golden Rule is in America in 1988? "He who has the gold makes the rules!" In America we have taken the golden rule and twisted it around until we make it say something like "Do unto others before they do it unto you!" That's not at all what Jesus said. Jesus said, "The way you want to be treated by other people you treat them that way first! Regardless of how they treat you." That's the third step on his downward decline.

4. He deceived himself

Here’s the fourth step on his downward decline: He deceived himself. He thought he was so strong he would not give in to temptation. What we learn here is you are never beyond the reach of temptation. How did Samson deceive himself? He thought he could play with sin and not get hurt. He thought he could play with fire and not get burned. Then, enters this woman named Delilah. The Bible tells us Judges 16:1, “One day Samson went to Gaza,” which is a Philistine city “where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.” It says in verse 4 “Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah.” We don’t know if the two are the same or not. Some have said they are. All we know is it says he fell in love with her, but of course the entire time he had a physical attraction to this woman, Delilah, she was in league with the Philistines and she was used as a secret agent to try to destroy the greatest warrior of Israel: Samson.

The Philistines talked to Delilah and said, “Oh, Delilah. Tell us! What’s his secret so we can learn how to conquer him? So as only Delilah could do she went to Samson and said, “Oh, Samson. Tell me please! Tell me please! Tell me please! What’s the secret of your strength?” Samson said, “Well I’ll tell you, Delilah, but don’t you tell anybody!” “Oh, I won’t!” “If you tie me up with bowstrings (like on a bow and arrow) that have never been put on a bow before, my strength is gone and I will be as weak as any other man.” That night as Samson is asleep (He does a lot of sleeping in this chapter.) she takes new bowstrings and she ties him up. Can’t you just see her circling him and tying him up with these new bowstrings? Then, she runs a test. The Philistines with all their swords and spears were hidden on the side and she says, “Samson! Samson! The Philistines are here!” He wakes up and jumps up popping those bowstrings “Where are they?” That didn’t work. So then she cried. “Oh, Samson you weren’t honest with me! Don’t you trust me? Come on tell me the secret of your strength!” Finally, he said, “Okay! If you take new ropes, green, fresh ropes that have never before been used tie me up with those ropes and I will be as weak as any man.” Here he is asleep again. She ties him up with new ropes. “Samson! Samson! The Philistines are upon us!” He jumps up and breaks out of those ropes. “Where are they? I’m ready!” “You lied to me again! Come on! Tell me the truth!” Don’t you know by now she is pleading a little bit? I won’t call it nagging yet. She is just pleading. “Tell me the truth!” Did you notice each time he makes a wrong answer he gets closer to the truth. He said, “Okay. I’ll tell you this. Take my hair and make seven braids and you weave it into a loom a weaver’s loom Then, stick a wooden pin in there and then I am as weak as any man!” He goes to sleep again and starts snoring. Don’t you know it must have taken a lot of work to weave his hair into seven braids and then weave that hair into a wooden loom and stick a long pin in there. Finally it must have been around daylight when she finished. “Samson! Samson! The Philistines are upon us!” He wakes up and jerks that loom out rushes out. Can’t you see him with a big, wooden rack hanging from his hair? “Where are they? I’m ready for them!” “You lied to me again.”

Look at Judges 16:15. She’s not the first nor the last woman who spoke like this. “Then she said to him, ‘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 you haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.’ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. So he told her everything. ‘No razor has ever been used on my head’ he said,

‘because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.’”

That night he goes to sleep with his head in her lap you know this is so much easier than tying him up with bowstrings or ropes or weaving his hair into a loom. She cuts his hair and shaves his head. Then, for the fourth time she says, “Samson! Samson! The Philistines are upon us” and he jumps up and he is ready to fight them again. This is one of the saddest verses in all of the Bible:

Judges 16:20. “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.”

Isn’t that sad? He did not know that the Lord had left him. What a tremendous lesson this is about the subtleness of sin! He didn’t just jump into this one day; it was a gradual decline. Suddenly he woke up one day and the power of the Lord was not in his life. I’m talking to Christians for just a moment. I’m talking to Christians who cannot lose their salvation. Once you are in the family of God you are always in the family of God. You’ll go to heaven when you die. It IS possible, however, for you to lose your spiritual effectiveness and your spiritual power. The sad thing is when you play around with sin, you won’t lose your salvation, but you’ll lose your spiritual effectiveness and your spiritual power and you’ll wake up one day and you’ll shake yourself and think, “I’ve got it all together,” and you don’t even know that the power of God has left your life. How sad! How sad! “Oh that’ll never happen to me!” One of the things we all need to realize is that we can deceive ourselves.

I almost got into an argument one time with a guy who gave his testimony. He said, “You know you can fool other people, but you can never fool yourself.” I said, “You are so wrong, buddy! You can fool yourself. If you ever think you can’t fool yourself, you are fooling yourself right then!” You had better realize it’s possible for me to deceive myself it’s possible for you to deceive yourself. We have blind spots in our lives and if we are not careful, we’ll deceive ourselves. James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!” I said the saddest thing about this was it was just a slow, gradual decline. Have you heard of the expression, “the frog and the kettle?” If you put a frog in boiling water it is going to jump out as quickly as it can but you can take a frog and put it in lukewarm water and you can slowly and gradually increase the temperature. You can literally boil that frog to death slowly. The frog never knows what it is happening if you do it slowly enough. That is the insidious nature of sin and temptation. Very slowly and very subtly, if you are not careful, sin will slip in and you’ll lose your effectiveness.

5. He determined his future

There is a semi-good ending—it is not a great ending—but it is a semi-good ending at least. Number five: He determined his future.

Judges 16:21. “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 in the prison. But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.”

1. Sin always blinds you

2. Sin always binds you

Sin always blinds you. You think that it’s not bad, that it’s not going to hurt you and you think it’s not dangerous, but sin has a blinding effect. That’s exactly what they did to Samson they gouged out his eyes. Number two sin always binds you.

3. Sin always breaks you

I grew up sitting in church next to my mother and she had one of these great old Bibles with pictures in it. There was a picture about every 100 pages. One of my favorites was this big, old man bald, blind pushing a millstone. That picture used to scare me. That’s a picture of what sin will do to you. It did it to Samson it’ll do it to you. It will blind you it will bind you and number three it’ll break you. It hurts you. You’ve heard me say before, “Sin takes you farther than you wanted to go and keeps you longer than you wanted to stay. It costs you more than you wanted to pay!

In the end, Samson prays. In the whole story about Samson there are only two prayers he ever prays. The first was when he was thirsty, “God give me drink!” Then notice the final prayer he prays.

Judges 16:28. “Then Samson prayed to the Lord, ‘O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes!’”

When he prayed this, he had been brought before the Philistines for entertainment. His hair had begun to grow back but it wasn’t his hair that gave him strength. It was the prayer of faith that brought the strength back. Did you notice his hair grew back but God didn’t give him his sight back? That’s just part of the consequences of sin. He lost his sight; he lost his hair; he lost his strength; he lost his freedom and he lost his usefulness. That’s what sin does.

Finally he prays, “Oh, God. In my death somehow use me!” He was saying, “God, I would rather die for your cause than to live as a slave and as your enemy!” All the Philistine leaders, around 3,000 of them gathered in this great hall. They brought up this ex-warrior from the Israelites. They laughed at him as he was brought up in his chains. Samson put one hand on one column the other hand on the other column. “God, just one more time, give me strength!” It was the spirit of God that once again came upon him. He gave him strength and Samson pushed. I started to say, “with all of his might” but it wasn’t *his* might. He didn’t push with any of his might. He pushed with the might of God and the building came down, killing Samson but also killing all the Philistine leaders. So at least in the end, Samson did something to redeem some of the failures and mistakes he had made.

The final thing I learned from this is that God is in the business of restoring failures. God is in the business of making something out of people who have blown it big-time. So if you are here tonight and you are heading down this slippery slope—STOP! Turn around! But if you are here

tonight and you feel like you have gone down that slope and have failed the Lord, don’t despair, because God is in the business of restoring failures.

OUTLINE

Samson’s slippery slope of sin:

1. He defied his parents
2. He defiled his body
3. He demanded revenge
4. He deceived himself
5. He determined his future

Sin always

1. blinds you
2. binds you
3. breaks you