

2/9/20 - Judges 13-16 - "Samson: A Legacy of Apathy"

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father God, we are at your mercy of helping us to look at your text today that you've put in our hands.

And Father, knowing that it is a gift from you to reveal yourself to us, Father, we ask that at this moment to reveal you, to reveal yourself to us through your word, Father, to equip us with every good work and correct us and encourage us.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. It's a long section of passage, I know. History accounts and records the mighty legacies, the mighty legacies of many men and women all throughout history, doesn't it?

Especially the mighty interventions of God. We see that in this passage even today. Walking through some older churches, I was just, I just drove down to, does anybody know where, what is that?

Down in Mingo Junction, Ohio. It's south of Steubenville. Yeah. Keep your doors locked. But it was scary down there.

[1 : 19] There was, there were abandoned buildings and everything. I was just down there yesterday. I bought, bought something. This doesn't sound right. But I bought something from a Facebook marketplace from the shady building.

And it was, it was a legal transaction. I just want to put that out there for you. It was not. But the people were demoing a church down there.

And going into that church, I even saw pictures up on a wall of these old church members that were all gathered at various times, eating dinner and doing things together, smiling together.

And this church is empty. Windows are missing. The church is, is completely torn apart. The ceiling's ripped out. I was down there looking for ceiling tile and buying ceiling tile from them.

But just, you, you imagine looking at those pictures and wondering what happened during those times. During all those, the, the legacy from how long that church has been there since 1800s.

[2 : 22] The legacy of that was in there. And my grandma's church once had a hallway full with pictures of various pastors and saints that have gone before. And you kind of walk down that hallway and just, just pick and choose one, one person and wonder, I wonder what his legacy was at this church.

I wonder what he left. I wonder what people spoke on his behalf. We meet Samson. And this is a man with quite a legacy, isn't it? This man was, started off really well, quite promising in the beginning.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in chapter 13 twice to his parents and ascended into a flame. Samson's birth was miraculous.

He was born to a barren woman. You don't even know her name, but we know the father's name. His identity, Samson's identity was to be set apart as a Nazirite of God.

And his destiny was to be blessed and empowered by God. Number six, if that doesn't, if that doesn't ring a bell to you, it probably doesn't unless you've read numbers.

[3 : 37] But number six explains clearly what being a Nazirite of God was known to be. This was done by voluntarily taking a special vow in Scripture, as it's listed.

A vow of dedication to the Lord as a Nazirite in number six. This is a life set apart and abstinence of three things.

The first thing is consuming grape-related products. The other is cutting your hair. And the third is contact with corpses. What could go wrong, right?

What could go wrong? He has everything working in his favor. He's not even born yet, and he has his parents on track with what they're to do.

However, hidden and sprinkled within this grand narrative of our twelfth judge of Israel, the last judge listed in the book of Judges, we can identify this as far from a dreamy beginning.

[4 : 35] This culture and period of time marks apathy. Remember what we spoke about several weeks ago, apathy. Because in this account in chapter 13, there's no mention of crying out to the Lord.

They're actually oppressed for 40 years. This is the longest period of oppression in the book of Judges. They had to be reminded three times of the dietary prohibitions, which possibly reflect ignorance to the Torah.

Manoah's wife seemed concerned more about bearing a child than Israel finally being delivered. Manoah himself expressed distrust for the wife, the angel, and God.

And they named Samson after a pagan origin. It means sun man. This nation is completely lost, oppressed for 40 years.

So maybe the most miraculous thing to occur at this time within the beginning of this narrative is God taking the initiative for Israel. Israel never cries out to the Lord.

[5 : 47] They don't even acknowledge that they need help in this passage, do they? God intervenes and takes the initiative. God intervenes not because they even want it.

They're okay with being oppressed. They're used to it after 40 years, and they definitely don't deserve it. And God shows up and gives man quite an opportunity to turn the table, setting this child apart before birth.

All the odds, if all the other 11 judges have failed, surely this 12th judge is going to get it done right. He's setting them apart at a young age. What could go wrong? Well, for any Matrix fans out there, this is Morpheus speaking.

This is the one. This is the one that's going to make a difference. So Samson was a man that was obviously spoken about for ages to come.

All these stories of mighty feats you can imagine. A man who left quite a legacy for generations to come. Year after year, generation after generation.

[6 : 51] He reminds me of a Greek mythical being kind of like Hercules. You talk about Hercules. My son, you know, watches the old cartoons. He knows Hercules, the mighty strength that he had.

And Samson was noteworthy in his mighty defeats. He tears apart a lion with his bare hands. Who knew? He took on 30 Philistines at his wedding ceremony down in the city before his marriage was even finalized using the riddle.

With his bare hands, he took the jawbone of a donkey and took on 1,000 Philistines. Not many of us can probably take on 1,000 men with our bare hands.

Maybe one person. But with his bare hands, he pushed the pillars apart and brought that dwelling of 3,000 people to the ground.

This was amazing, church. Absolutely amazing. Not only was he remembered within his family tree for centuries to come, but he was listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

[8 : 02] This is a great man who's even remembered in the New Testament letters. Truly, this man was by God, and God's purpose was revealed through Samson. But something seems missing, doesn't it?

In this whole passage, something seems missing. You've got mighty feet after mighty feet. The Lord's intervention, something seems missing. In chapter 14, maybe it's Samson's devotion to chasing around women and chasing around the enemy on his own fury and whim rather than his devotion to God.

After all, Samson's choice of women in chapter 14 was right in his eyes. By his evaluation and standard, it didn't matter what Deuteronomy 7 told him to live like.

It was right in his eyes. He was the standard. It was up to his objection. His character is developing quite vividly early in this narrative in chapter 14 and after God miraculously intervening on Israel's behalf.

Chapter 14 accounts for his selfish and willful disengagement from God, unaware of God's great plans of using him. He was busy chasing around women and seeking revenge against the Philistines.

[9 : 25] You know, Samson often reminds me, it wasn't too long ago, we had a sermon in James. If you remember, I think it was the first sermon of the year. And Samson reminds me of the man who James 1.24 speaks about, the man who looks intently in the mirror.

He knows his identity. And upon leaving the mirror, he immediately forgets who he was, what he looks like. Samson is truly enslaved by his flesh and his sensual desires throughout this passage.

And this carries over to chapter 15 as well, upon returning from this selfish game of playing the Riddler. Samson comes back with blood on his hands, you know, in a fury looking for his wife, with a young goat in hand.

That was equivalent to a bouquet of roses back in that day. I don't know if that's charming in this day in culture, bringing a young goat. Hey, take me back, woman. But it was equivalent to a bouquet.

But his wife, feeling deserted, was given to his best man. This was culturally appropriate at the time. He didn't finalize his marriage until that wedding night.

[10 : 35] And he didn't. And so his wife was given to his best man. Not only was Samson recorded as being the only one suffering from disobedient apathy, but the entire tribe of Judah in chapter 15 joins the narrative and they helped the Philistines to capture him.

3,000 of them. They turned him over to the Philistines. All of Israel seemed to be content with the political status quo of cooperation with the enemy.

And this comes into full circle in chapter 16 as Samson again is caught in his sensual desire seeking out a prostitute, ultimately leads to his humiliation and exposure in Gaza.

The sensual desires led him to being in love with a woman named Delilah. Ooh, Delilah. Another woman right in his eyes, which led to his compromise of his God-given status.

And being sexually swayed by her, she led to temporary loss of blessing of God and also his ultimate capture and loss of freedom and the gift of sight.

[11 : 46] Church desperate and disconnected. Samson still communed with God. Isn't that interesting? How he prayed to God for water. He was tired. He prayed to water and God gave him water.

I wouldn't have given anything. But with one final plea with God, in desperation for strength, this is the one last time that he can take advantage of the situation, both of which God answers providentially.

In verse 15, for his life, and God answers for his death. His life bringing him water and his death bringing those pillars down, which is a fulfillment of what was promised to his parents in chapter 13, verse 5.

Church, Samson had a clear calling in his life. He knew the Lord, and he still allowed his flesh to dominate his life. It may seem that the Lord used his flaws for his glory.

Yeah. But as the narrative plays out, his vendetta against the Philistines was fleshly pursuit of vengeance. It wasn't a life devoted to God.

[13 : 00] So thinking about today, Samson had purpose in life and lost sight of that purpose. This also was, Samson was a minor, kind of like a fixed representation of the entire nation of Israel at large.

The whole nation has lost sight of who they are and their purpose, and their calling from God. And might I ask you, how many times have we become so consumed the same way with the world church?

That we have lost sight of our purpose on this very earth, and our very usefulness of being set apart for eternal purpose and eternal value given to us by God.

Our pursuits often become concerned about what we want, what we desire, rather than what God wants and what God desires. I kind of think about it in this way. If we were Noah, given, we'll say in a modern day Noah, given a Home Depot credit card with no limit, and the Lord tells you to go to Home Depot and buy this gopher wood, it's just in, it's new in Home Depot, they have gopher wood now.

Go buy all this gopher wood, all the tools you need, go build this ark. How many of us would be prone to probably walk in Home Depot and be like, man, that vanity looks good.

[14 : 21] I'm just going to get a couple of these and a couple of those. Oh, a table saw. I don't think I'll need a table saw for gopher wood, but I'm going to get it anyhow. How many of us would take all the tools and resources that are provided by God and just turn around and think that we have a better idea and build something of our own without that obedience?

Can't lie to ourselves. And soon to follow, looking forward in the chapter 17, as we're coming to a close in the book of Judges, soon to follow, there's going to be a motif of people of Israel doing what's right in their own eyes and there's going to be a theme of God's absence.

As the body of book of Judges comes to a close today, there are several things evidence. Israel's increasing apathy and apostasy. God's, number two, God's chosen human agents are increasingly selfish.

The third thing is God's decreasing deliverance and presence. The fourth thing is the nation is intermixed with the enemy and unrecognizable. You can't tell the Israelites from the enemy anymore.

And even greater darkness awaits in the epilogue. This last thing, what a great account of God's sovereignty, church, and intervention upon this earth. A man so self-consumed but still used by God.

[15 : 45] Isn't that interesting? This should prove to us, church, that man was never the solution, but God is always the solution for the world's problems.

You might wonder why I took you through that long narrative of passage. Well, it's for a reason. Because the structure of this passage from chapter 13, 14, 15, and 16, there's actually parallelism.

If you know anything about scripture and structure, it's like A, B, B, A. The chapter 13 and 16 are parallel with one another and then the middle parts, chapter 14 and 15, are parallel with one another.

They're the same thing. So unless you want to hear the sermon four times in a row, I want to preach the meaning of the passage and use it well and steward the text well.

So the first and the last, the first chapter, the 13th chapter, reveals this miraculous beginning. And what does the 16th chapter reveal? Miraculous death.

[16 : 48] A beginning and death. It is a great quick freefall. And all this begs us to ask a question. I want to speak about it a little bit today. I want to ask ourselves, do we respond to God in a way that shows that we truly understand God's grace?

Do we always respond in a way that always reveals that we understand God's grace and His sovereignty in our disobedience? grace. We get quite acquainted with who we are and who God is, don't we, in this passage?

Let's talk about God's grace in spite of man in the first point. Grace is something understood as the goodness of God to the ill-deserving, giving them the complete opposite of what they deserve.

Don't we see that in this passage? A man full of rage and full of lust chasing after women still used by God. Samson's extraordinary feats have nothing to do with himself.

It has nothing solely to do with his long hair or his Nazarite status. We don't know anything about his muscular physique. This could have been some scrawny guy. It has nothing to do with his military skills or his clever words.

[18 : 13] All that Samson had, church, is because God gave it to him. Everything, every strength of empowerment, every inch of strength and perseverance to endure through the narrative was by God alone.

And it's also important to note that Samson's weakness is also due to God alone as well. It has nothing to do with his Rapunzel powerful locks of love.

It has nothing to do with that. It has nothing to do with Delilah's magical manipulation. His gift of strength was given to him by God alone and it was taken away and removed by God alone.

He gives and he takes away. God was clearly involved in spite of man's disobedience. This is grace, church. This would naturally bring one to be grateful for such a gift, right?

Samson should be grateful for the sake of his disobedience and to turn from his sin. But no, God was his calling card whenever he needed help.

[19 : 21] For God, out of his providential choosing, he bore with Samson, wicked man, and still used Samson despite his selfish motives. grace exists as the goodness of God toward habitual wretched sinners and disobedience constantly.

Rebellious man, even though they don't deserve it. This is the gospel, church. We don't deserve the very breath in our lungs, do we? For the wages of sin is death and all have fallen short of the glory of God just as Rick has spoken about this morning in the opening.

specifically looking at the nation of Israel at large, they suffered from this spiritual disease of apathy. Remember that one sermon several weeks ago, I think it was back in fall, since fall, when we spoke about apathy, when the nation of Israel was struggling passing on the torch and warning future generations of what is to come and to be aware of.

This culture was at its peak of apathy in Samson's account. I related it back in that sermon to that grandpa sitting on the rocking chair and, you know, grandpa's always got the fun stories.

All the kids gather around and hear grandpa's stories and then grandpa's back, back in the wilderness. I tell you, the Lord split and they're like, grandpa, okay, we don't want to hear your story of the wilderness and the water again.

[20 : 51] Apathy. They were just not interested, they were bored with that. And we're here with Samson and quite an apathetic generation. Samson is an all-encompassing judge.

Think about it. He had the craftiness of Ehud. All the judges are kind of within Samson's own being and his character. He had the craftiness of Ehud. He had the apathy like Barak and the insecurity like Gideon and pride and rage of Abimelech who Abimelech wasn't even a judge.

Barak wasn't a judge, but these leaders who are mentioned in all the book of Judges. And he had loose lips, obviously, with the riddle that he gave. He has loose lips like Jephthah. Bloch says that no deliverer in the book of Judges matches Samson's potential.

No judges in the book match his potential. Despite all these advantages and this special attention, Samson accomplishes less on behalf of his people than any of his predecessors, any other judge in the book.

But what does man historically do with God's grace and his provisions? They lose sight of it, they become self-consumed, they become bored, they become apathetic.

[22 : 04] How many of us have been provoked to anger due to somebody else's apathy? I want to think about that for a moment as we're nearing the end of our time.

It's those situations when it's a holiday get-together. Does anybody have a Thanksgiving dinner with friends or family?

And there's always that one person cleaning up, laboring and toiling in the kitchen with a vacuum, trying to wash the walls and vacuum at the same time, sweat dripping down their face, doing all the work.

and there's Uncle Bob sitting on the couch, sitting on his biscuit, playing video games or taking a nap. Apathy.

He didn't care. Think about those situations at work, Walmart, Home Depot, any place. When you're sweating, you got this task, say Black Friday's coming and the manager's pressing you hard to get.

[23 : 09] All these shelves, cross-merchandise, thinking about all these things you have to do. You're stripping in sweat. You have so much work to do. You're looking around for who's supposed to be helping you and it's coffee break again.

Really? Or they're playing on their phones. Apathy. Just don't care. They don't get it. And you think about how apathy, apathetic people antagonize us in this life.

Think about how it makes the Lord God feel when His people are apathetic. Apathy actively antagonizes God, church.

It antagonizes Him. It mocks Him. It develops a culture who loses sight of their identity and their very purpose. For Samson and for the nation of Israel, we see that, right?

It's almost like we need a reminder of 1 Corinthians in chapter 1, verse 26. We forget how Paul says, for consider your calling, brothers.

[24 : 22] Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. He uses us in this very way. There's nothing that will destroy a church.

I think about that church that's closed and being torn apart with those pictures still hanging inside. There's nothing that will destroy a church quicker than, swifter than filling chairs with apathetic people.

apathy actively antagonizes God. And might we be apathetic at times? How about the church who might be lucky to gather on Sunday mornings?

And when it comes to being the church, actually doing other church stuff other than just meeting and having a huddle, a group huddle, but actually going out and preaching the gospel to your neighbors?

[25 : 22] What? What, Brent? Yeah. Going, taking the message from here and going out? Apathy.

How are we doing in this? Because this is not God's design of the church just to huddle and let it be, stay there. And this is a sickness that needs to be diagnosed and cured by God alone.

Because think about it, just down the road is YSU. YSU cries out for truth. YSU cries out for us to reach them.

Look where we're located, church. We're right here. You want a mission field, you don't have to go very far. Walk ten minutes down the road and you're there. The neighbors around us cry out for us to reach them, church.

God has never placed us here to, God has placed us here to reach them. And we tend to just sleep in on Sunday mornings or when we're supposed to do something, we're just like, yeah, maybe, no.

[26 : 27] I mean, we say we're going to do something, we just don't follow through. Are we apathetic, church? Might we be apathetic? Never prioritize God's mission of this church or in our schedules.

Apathy actively antagonizes God. And the only hope is to repent immediately of that. If kind of saying these things you feel sort of a conviction, I'm challenging to repent of it and get into God's narrative of this church and family if we fall victim to a condition like Israel was in.

Because look, Samson often looked back at who he was. He cried out to God because he needed water and God granted it to him. He knew who to cry out to. And his last final dying breath was crying out to God for one last bit of strength.

He knew who he belonged to but he didn't live like it. What might your role be in the narrative of this church? Everyone who's gathered here.

Members or just regular attenders. First timers, welcome. We preach the word. Sorry if this is a little bit hard for you. If it is, if your role is passivity, I want to challenge you to activity and watch the Lord what he, watch what the Lord has in store for us as we are devoted to him.

[27 : 48] Watch what happens. May our interest be found in him alone. Let our vengefulness be found in him alone. It's in his hands alone anyhow. Let our boast be him alone. Let our words declare him alone.

Lest we agonize God through, by way of our apathy. And I also want to look at God's sovereignty in spite of man. The second point, because we also have to look at God's sovereignty in this narrative.

God is in the business of using unworthy human agents to accomplish his divine plans. Regardless of Samson's flaws and his vengeful and sensual tendencies, he's always looking to beat somebody up, one of the Philistines, or he's looking for a girl.

God is in the business of using unworthy human agents. And mankind plays a role in his sovereignty, a very vital role. This is where we get an important note.

And this is important, church. You need to hear this. This does not negate the effect of your decisions and human choices throughout history. God's end should never justify the means.

[29 : 03] So, God's end should never justify our human means. Man is still responsible for our decisions as well as our consequences. There's no playing, well, you know, God is sovereign.

Like, whoop, pulling the God is sovereign card which lets me continue to be apathetic and continue my own merry way because God's going to work it out, right? There's no God is sovereign card.

We all are responsible for our decisions and the consequences. So, do not fall victim of abusing God's sovereignty and using his ultimate ends to justify means, especially of apathy.

You have an active role of either obedience or disobedience, church. So, as we come to a close, if there is a sin hidden in your life, like looking at grace, looking at sovereignty, if there is sin hidden within your life which is affecting your devotion of God, yes, God is sovereign.

He's going to fulfill his plans whether you acknowledge your sin or not, whether you turn your life over to him or not, he is still king and his grace is sufficient.

[30 : 19] But are you honoring God with your response to his grace and his sovereignty? Are you honoring God with your response to his grace and his sovereignty?

And I challenge you to turn today. Do not let your life just slide by allowing your sin to conquer you. So, as we come to a close, in summary from the Samson story as well as our own, we know that the goodness of God is experienced through his grace and intervening on our behalf.

God accomplished this tangibly, not by crushing us wretched sinners, because the truth is we don't deserve the breath in our lungs. It is by grace that we're saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

He did not choose to crush us, but he crushed himself on the cross. Our sins were laid upon him, and if this is a message to you today that you are not familiar with, hear it and take quite attention to this message today, that Jesus Christ died on your behalf.

Just like all of us, we are just other, we are all beggars. You think the church is full of perfect people? It is not. It's people who are needy constantly, day and night.

[31 : 36] We are Samson, who falls short. We are every judge that we have listed who has fallen short. We are every rebellious person, but by God's grace, we are saved through faith and we are justified.

We are declared righteous in his sight. This is good news. So if there are sinners, anybody who is apart from Jesus Christ this morning, who does not know him personally, just trust in that message and come to light, and he will do the rest of the work within you.

But if you are a saint gathered here, if you are saved by grace, there should be nothing but conviction and correction and sometimes encouragement. Sometimes we are, we are, this is almost a good message because we are not apathetic.

God is calling us to respond by laying our apathy at the foot of the cross and outflow in our devotion to him. There is nothing that quenches the glory of God more than the disease of apathetic churches.

Let us be saved from that. God have mercy on all of us if we ever find ourselves just playing church or using a title of church. And thinking back to the opening of the message, thinking of the legacy within that church that I visited down in Mingo Junction, Ohio, or thinking back at my grandma's church with all those pastors up on the wall of just decades long of legacies.

[33 : 11] We should be driven to take care with every moment God calls us to respond in obedience as his church. No one becomes a Christian because life is easy.

Yes, doing this is very, very hard. Yes, that is true. But it is worth it and this is our calling and our purpose and we can't not waste it lest we antagonize God by our futile faith.

So remember your calling. Reach forward by God's strength alone. And thinking, think about this. Think like huge. Think a hundred years down the line. When you think, when people think back upon the legacy of this church right now, a hundred years from now, I'll probably be six foot under probably a couple ashes.

I don't know what my wife has decided yet. But, but a hundred years down the line, what will your legacy be as a church member here? What will your legacy look like in this church?

What will the legacy of this church look like? God is calling for a church to declare his glory and grace. Are we willing to respond in obedience to this call?

[34 : 23] Sinner coming to faith or saint coming to repentance? What are you waiting for? Because I'm ready, church. I'm praying that you're ready as well. Let us join together for the glory of God and let that shine through this church.

Let's get busy this year. We have a lot of plans in store. Please join me in a word of prayer. Father. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.