

Samson II: Downfall & Death

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[0 : 00] Amen. Thank you so much, guys in the band, for leading us so far. David, thank you so much for reading Judges 16 for us. Are we all well? We're okay. Great.

Samson, what a guy. One thing you can say is his life was not boring. And so we excitedly turn to Judges 16 this evening. So why don't you have that passage open in front of you? And let's pray and let's ask for God's help as we come to his word this evening.

Amen. And so our loving, heavenly Father and our all-powerful, almighty God in heaven, we come before you this evening and we still our hearts before your word, recognizing that it is no ordinary book, that, Father, it is your inspired and breathed out word.

And so, Father, we ask that your spirit would come now, Lord, as these words, are opened as we think about them. And, Father, would you challenge us tonight as your people? Would you convict us tonight as your people?

And would you change us tonight as your people? And, Father, this is our prayer because we make it in the powerful and the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. So a few weeks ago we had a wonderful family morning out at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery on Queen Street.

[1 : 25] Has anyone been to the Scottish National Portrait Gallery? So it's well worth visiting. It's an excellent facility. We'd never been before as a family. Ironically, since we live literally like 30 seconds around the corner, you just never do these things.

So we went to the Scottish National Portrait Gallery on Queen Street. We'd never been before. We walked in. We spoke to the chap on reception and said, what's worth seeing in this museum?

And he said, well, if you go up to the third floor, you'll find the portraits of famous Scottish people.

And we were trying to kill a bit of time and it was raining outside. So we thought, why not? So in the lift, we got up to the third floor to the gallery of portraits of famous Scottish people.

The door's open. First person you're confronted with, there's Chris Hoy. He's got his full gear on. He's got his Olympic medals around his neck. He's looking macho.

Somebody's drawn Chris Hoy. And we make our way round and then we discover, oh, there's Annie Lennox. And we walk around and, oh, there's Ewan McGregor.

[2 : 28] Keep on walking around and there's Billy Connolly. Keep walking around and Chloe, my daughter, she looks at one of the paintings. And she says, mummy, who's that?

So my wife is English. She said, mummy, who's that on the wall? And Alex turned to her and said, I've got no idea. She read the plaque. Gavin Hastings. No idea who Gavin Hastings is.

I thought to myself, you've got no idea who Gavin Hastings is. The only, the most celebrated Scottish rugby player ever to have played the game. And so you can understand that this trip turned from being a recreational activity to an educational activity.

Took it upon myself to educate my family in the realm of famous Scots. But here's what I want you to do as we come to this passage this evening. I've got two questions for you. Here's the first one I want you to imagine in your mind.

The owner of the gallery comes to you and says, we're looking to set up a new portrait gallery. We want to set up a new Christian portrait gallery. We want to find the faces of faith.

[3 : 31] Those heroes of the Christian faith. We want you to think of people to put in that gallery. So who would you think of? Who would you think of?

What faces are coming to mind? Here's the second question as we begin this evening. As we come to Judges chapter 16. Would Samson be there?

Would Samson be there? This man we've met him over the past few weeks. This man who had a quite spectacular start. This man whose birth, remember the angel announced to his parents that this boy was going to be born.

And he was going to be called by God to be set apart for him. God pronounced over his life that he was going to be a Nazarite from birth. He was going to be the one who would begin to save God's people from their enemies.

And this was the man who, if you remember, that God's spirit was stirring into action. This was Samson. But the man with a quite spectacular start turned out to be the man with a quite unspectacular life.

[4 : 38] He's a man with a soft spot for a woman. He's a man who was unconcerned about keeping his Nazarite vows. He's a man with a temper.

Would you have Samson's picture in the Christian Hall of Fame? We'll come with me to chapter 16 of Judges. Now we spent last week thinking about the birth and the life of this man, Samson.

Well this week we're going to think about his life and his death. So the question is, what kind of man will Samson turn out to be? Would you have Samson in your Christian Hall of Fame?

Well here we go. This is verses 1 to 3 of chapter 16. We meet Samson, the distracted man. We pick up the story of verse 1 of Samson.

He's going to Gaza. And again we see in his life the same old destructive pattern that we've seen time and time again. That Samson sees this woman. And Samson, not being driven by love, but rather being driven by his passions.

[5 : 43] And being steered by wanting what his eyes fancy. He must have this woman. And he spends the night with this woman. And this is blatant sin.

And this is blatant disobedience from Samson. We get the sense that Samson has stopped caring about anyone else other than himself. Here is Samson.

Well word gets around the people of Gaza that Samson, the most wanted man in town, is in town. Samson rises and he makes his stand.

Do you see it? By ripping out the doors of the city gates, he exposes the city to danger. And he carries those gates to the top of the hill in Hebron. Now you have to say as we read that, it's a bit bizarre.

As my mum always used to say, it's a bit OTT. Is it not? It's a bit over the top. Samson drags these bars to the top of the hill. And I think as the reader, we're meant to get the impression that Samson at this point is a man who is utterly out of control.

[6 : 50] Utterly out of control. His high calling in life. Remember his calling that God had placed on his life that we met a few chapters ago. Seemingly resigned to the what could have been archives.

He's a careless man. Why is he a careless man? Because he couldn't care less about his actions. Couldn't care less about the consequences.

And most of all, he couldn't care less about honoring the God who has called him to himself, who set him apart and asked him to live a life of devotion to him. Samson couldn't care less.

So this is Samson, the distracted man. It's in the meeting in verses 1 to 3. Would you have Samson in your Christian Hall of Fame? Let's continue on. Verses 4 to 22 of chapter 16, we meet Samson, the besotted man.

And here we meet Delilah. Notice a few details at verses 4 and 5 about her. Where does Samson meet her? The Valley of Sorek.

[7 : 53] Now the Hebrew word there, connotations, it means the Valley of Choice Wine. That's what the Valley of Sorek means. The Valley of Choice Wine. So there's grape and there's wine, connotations in that name.

The author again causing alarm bells to go off in her minds. That this is not a smart move from Samson. This is not something he should be meddling with. But Samson goes to the Valley of Sorek.

There he is. That's where she is. And who comes to Delilah? The lords of the Philistines. So Samson is an enemy. But he's become the people's enemy.

So the top of the Philistine tree, they want him dead. You can imagine it. Throughout Philistine outposts where the Philistines live, there are wanted posters plastered all over those places.

Samson's face on them. We want this man dead. Wanted. Underneath. Reward of found. Samson's a wanted man. How are they going to get him?

[8 : 59] Well, they're going to exploit his weakness. Where is his weakness? In his eye for a beautiful woman. Delilah's up for the job. Each of them, do you notice, will give her 1,100 pieces of silver.

So clearly there's some serious money to be made for Delilah here. This would likely set her up for life. Not only that, but if you imagine in her mind, she will go down in folklore.

She will go down in history as the one who was able to take down the macho man. She'll be a Philistine legend. She won't have to pay for a drink again in her life.

And all that she needs to do is get Samson to talk. Interesting to note why the Philistines want to take him down, notice in the passage.

Because they want to humble him. And you must say, as the reader, from what we've seen of Samson so far, that we'd be forgiven for kind of wishing that on Samson ourselves.

[10:02] So Delilah sets about getting him to talk. And you have to say, you might have noticed it as we read it through, that she's not exactly subtle about her intentions.

Again, she's playing off against Samson's love of a challenge. Three times you notice it, she attempts to break him. Samson, what's your secret? Samson responds three times.

Samson, verse 7. What does he tell her? Bow strings. What happens next? The Philistines are upon you, Samson. Is it bow strings? It's not bow strings.

Samson wins. Samson, what's your secret? Verse 11, here's round two. New ropes. The Philistines are upon you, Samson. Is it new ropes? It's not new ropes.

Samson wins again. She goes for it the third time. Do you see it? Do you see the tension building? Verse 13, weave my hair together.

[11:02] Do you notice Samson's allowing her to get a little bit closer to the truth? Weave my hair together. Philistines are upon you, Samson. Is it weaving hair? No, it's not weaving hair.

Round three, Samson wins again. But here's the question that I'm asking as a reader. I'm reading this account. And the question I'm asking in my mind is not, why, why, why, Delilah?

Because I know, why, why, why, Delilah? Because Delilah's all about the money, money, money.

The question is not, why, why, why, Delilah? The question, surely, is, why, why, why, Samson?

Why has he not clicked by now what she's up to? Fair enough, after round one, you might give her the benefit of the doubt that she made a massive misjudgment of error.

She made a huge mistake and she's picked a fight with the wrong guy. But after round three, Samson, call me cynical, but I'm beginning to think she's just not that into you.

[12:03] As Tom Jones sang all those years ago, and you knew he was coming, didn't you? I could see that girl was no good for me, but I was lost like a slave that no man could free.

Profound Mr. Jones. So will Samson read the signs? Will he read the signs? Will he wake up and smell the coffee? Will this be the chance for one of those, Delilah, this really isn't working out, can we just be friends kind of chance?

Verse 15. Will Samson learn his lesson? Verse 15. No, he won't. And you have to hand it to Delilah. She's very persistent.

And cool and calculated, she begins to turn up the heat. And I'm sure she begins to turn on the waterworks as well. Samson, how can you say you love me when your heart is not with me?

I mean, she's good. But as a reader, are you not thinking? Samson, come on. Why not turn and put it back on her? How can you say that you love me when every time I tell you a secret, I wake up and there's a Philistine on me?

[13:12] But Samson doesn't say that. And I think here is what we're supposed to sense as the readers. Samson is a besotted man. Not so much in love with Delilah as he is in love with himself.

And Samson has convinced himself that he is almost bulletproof. Now, verse 16, Delilah presses him hard. I love how the author conveys that to us.

If you've got an ESV there, it says, Until his soul was vexed to death. Now that is some serious nagging. Tragically, we read verse 17 that he told her.

What did he tell her? He told her all that was in his heart. My hair is shaved. My Nazarite vow will be broken.

My strength will leave me and I'll become like any other man. That's what he tells her. And interesting to reflect on what Samson reveals there. Was it his hair that gave him his strength?

[14:16] It wasn't his hair that gave him the strength. It was the Lord that gave him the strength. So easy to miss that little detail in it, isn't it? In the narrative. But with the cutting of his hair goes the keeping of the third of those Nazarite vows.

No wine. Touch no unclean thing. No razor on your head. Now Samson has broken numbers one and two last week. And here he is breaking number three this week. And verse 20.

The recurring phrase. The Philistines are upon you Samson. Only this time. It's the real deal. Samson tries the same trick again.

Thinking that he can defend himself. But here at verse 20. We're invited to play a game of spot the difference. What's the difference between this time and the previous three times?

Verse 20. That he did not know. That the Lord had left him. Now that is the chilling truth for Samson in these verses.

[15:17] Because he is presumed on the presence of God with him. Despite his constant ignorance of him. And here as it were is God saying Samson.

Enough is enough. Enough is enough. I will not continue to have you mock me. I will not continue to be presumed upon. Enough is enough.

That is the chilling truth that Samson has to face up to here. And I think it's the chilling truth for the first Israelite readers of Samson's story. That they've got to face up to as well.

Now I don't know how many mirrors you have in your house. We live in a two bed flat. But we have four mirrors. One in the living room. Two in the bedroom. One in the bathroom.

And one just at the front door. That's even five. A lot of mirrors. But the last thing before I do every morning. Is I look in the mirror that's right beside our door.

[16:19] And I look in that mirror. And I make the change that I need to make. Well here as we look at Samson. Here is a mirror that invites us as the reader.

To make the change. They are meant to that as the first readers. To look at Samson. To look at his story. And see themselves. And heed the warning.

And make the change. To not presume on God's presence with them. To not presume on God's kindness. To not presume on the grace of God.

To not presume on his forgiveness. And Samson's story still speaks today. Let me ask you. Ask us this evening.

Are some of us here. And we're presuming on God's grace. Are we presuming on his kindness. Are we giving him lip service. Are we giving him token religious gestures.

[17:21] But privately. If you were to dig around. Our lives actually tell a very different story. As to what's really going on in our hearts. Samson's story. Samson's story.

Samson's downfall. Invites us to look at him. See the mirror. And ask ourselves. And heed the warning. Not to push God to the point. Where he has to say enough is enough.

God will not be mocked. God will humble if he needs to. Samson. Enough is enough. Justin Taylor. A Christian blogger. Writes this. The church should be a safe place for sinners. Without being a safe place for sin. Back in the narrative.

Verse 21. Samson is captured. His eyes are gouged out. He's bound. And he's thrown into a Philistine prison. And he's put to task.

[18:21] To grind the mill. And what we're supposed to see. As the readers. Is that this hero. Has well and truly hit zero. So would you put.

Samson's picture in the Christian Hall of Fame. Yeah. Well in verses. 23 to 27 of chapter 16. We meet Samson. The humbled man. The Philistines.

They gather together. And they celebrate. The capture of this man. Now notice why they celebrate in the text. Because they've captured Samson. Yes they celebrate because they've captured Samson.

But there's another reason that the author gives us. The Philistines see the capturing of Samson. As testament. To the mighty power of their God. Dagon. This Philistine God.

Look how the author conveys it to us. Verse 23. Our God has given. Verse 24. They praised their God. Why? Because our God has given.

[19:20] We're under no illusions as a reader. That this is how they view this victory. They reckon. They reckon. That Dagon. Has triumphed.

Over Israel's God. Yahweh. And the feast goes on into the night. Spirits are merry. Understandably. Some people think. Let's get our spoil out.

And let's get them to dance. Do you see it? We're specifically told. That they asked Samson out. To dance and sing. We're specifically told twice. That Samson entertained them.

What are they doing? They're mocking them. They're taunting them. Who's at this party? Verse 27. The lords of the Philistines. 3,000 men and women.

In and around the vicinity. This is a big party. A big party. And Samson. Is the headline act. So picture Samson. There he is.

[20 : 12] With his eyes. Gouged out. Paraded in front of all these people. Asked to entertain them. Samson has well and truly been humbled. And the question we have to ask his readers is.

Is this how it's going to end. For God's servant? Will the Lord allow his name. And his glory. To be made mud. By the followers of this pagan God.

No chance. And we read verses 28 to 31 of chapter 16. Of Samson the vindicated man. Now Samson has been well and truly humbled by the Philistines.

But I think we need to see more importantly. That he's also been humbled by the Lord. So what will Samson do? Will Samson go out on a whim? No.

This humbled man. He finally comes to his senses. Sometimes a wonderful truth about the Christian life isn't it? Sometimes we come to our senses when the Lord humbles us. This humbled man.

[21 : 14] He comes to his senses. Whereas before he presumed on the Lord. Now here he is. From the depths of his sin. In the lowest moment of his life. Aware of his failure. Calling out to the Lord.

Praying to God. Verse 28. Samson calls to the Lord. Samson calls to the Lord. And so the question we've got to ask. Is the Lord going to hear him?

Will the Lord hear him? This man. Will the Lord listen to this man? This womanizer of a man? This rebel of a man? This man who has tested and tested and tested.

His patience time and time and time again. This man who even at the end of his life notice in the text. He still has revenge on his mind. Why would this man have any right to God's ear?

Why should this man be listened to by the almighty and holy God? But for the fact that God is gracious and faithful and full of steadfast love.

[22 : 17] The Lord hears the call of his servant. The Lord hears the call of one of his people. Now if the lesson of Samson's downfall is not to presume on the grace of God.

Then surely the lesson of verse 28. Is that this is who our God is. Holy. Gracious. Full of steadfast love.

Do not pass up the grace of God. That God's hand may justifiably cast down his people. When they turn from their ways. And they call out to him in repentance to save them.

He is open to hear their cries. And he is ready to act and save. And that's why we open tonight with the song Mighty to Save. That's exactly what happens here.

And you notice in the text that Samson who is the entertainer for the evening. He quite literally brings the house down. God has vindicated his servant. And notice that little phrase that the author gives us at the end of verse 30.

[23 : 23] That those that he killed in his death were more than those that he killed in his life.

In other words, Samson's greatest victory over the enemy came in the shape of his death. And sitting where we are in salvation history.

That truth rightly points us forward to another judge who God would raise up. Another saviour who God would raise up to save his people. Another saviour who would be betrayed by one close to him.

Another saviour who would be betrayed for pieces of silver. Another saviour who would be physically harmed. Another saviour who would be mentally mocked.

And ultimately another saviour whose greatest victory over the enemy would come in the shape of his death. Samson here rightly points us forward to the real saviour when he would come.

[24 : 32] God's anointed Jesus Christ. The true saviour who God's people need to turn to and trust to. And call out to him to save them. Amazing truth here is that Samson is a saviour who needs saved.

The wonderful truth about Jesus Christ is he is a saviour who offers salvation to all those who would come to him. This is our saviour, Jesus Christ.

But back to our question. We still haven't answered our question. Would you have Samson's picture in the Christian Hall of Fame? Well the striking thing is, and I clicked the slide too early there.

The striking thing is that the question has already been answered for us. And certainly when it comes to the Old Testament heroes, someone has already put together a Hall of Fame for us.

So listen, as we work towards a close this evening, why don't you turn to Hebrews chapter 11? This great chapter of the Hall of Fame of Faith.

[25 : 38] The writer to the Hebrews, just as you turn there, writing to his generation of Christians. Seeking to inspire them to keep on going with Jesus. No matter how hard it gets in life.

No matter what persecutions come your way. Keep going in your faith. So that you too will obtain the object of your faith. Namely that you may inherit eternal life and enter God's glorious presence. Made available to us. As we heard this morning, the narrow door made available to us through the person of Jesus Christ. Do not forsake him. Amen. Chapter 11.

Having already laid out many of the standout Old Testament performers, if you like. The faces of faith. Abraham. Isaac. Jacob.

Joseph. Rahab. Moses. Well, we come to verse 32. Let me just read a few verses for you. And track along with me if you're able.

[26 : 38] Verse 32. Hebrews 11. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon. Barak. Samson. And Jephthah.

About David and Samuel and the prophets. Who through faith conquered kingdoms. Administered justice and gained what was promised. Who shut the mouths of lions. Quenched the fury of the flames.

And escaped the edge of the sword. Whose weakness was turned to strength. And who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead.

Raised to life again. There were others who were tortured. Refusing to be released. That they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment.

They were put to death by stoning. They were sawed in two. They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheep skins and goat skins. Destitute, persecuted and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them.

[27 : 38] They wandered in deserts and mountains. Living in caves and in holes and in the ground. These were commended for their faith. Yet none of them received what had been promised.

Since God had planned something better for us. So that together with us. Would they be made perfect. So the truth.

Is that Samson. Is in the Christian Hall of Fame. Verse 39. Samson is among those commended for his faith. And so we have to ask.

Given what we've seen of this man over the last few weeks. Why is Samson in there? Well Samson may not be a model of faithfulness.

But he is to some extent. A wonderful model of faith. That God used him. Despite his faults. Despite his sin. Despite his failures.

[28 : 36] To deliver his people from their enemies. Now I find the fact that Samson is in here. Massively encouraging. Massively encouraging.

That the Bible. I love it. Presents us with these heroes of the faith. And what are they full of? Warts and all. God used them.

Not because they were good. But because he is good. And is one. Who knows his own weakness. And is one who knows his own sinful heart.

And is one who knows his own unspectacular life. And is one who knows that he is a pilgrim. On a journey home. The fact that Samson is in here. Gives me great hope. Verse 34.

Whose weakness was turned to strength. I think that's exactly what we see in Samson. For the majority of his life. What has he been doing? He's been running his own race. According to his own rules.

[29 : 32] As a rebel. But now in his darkest moments. In his weakness. He humbles himself. And in faith. Trusting not in who he is.

But rather realizing he is nothing. And trusting in who God is. He calls out to the Lord to save him. Trusting himself in the Lord. Throwing himself in the promises of God.

What a great model of faith. As I know the truth. That it's not about the greatness of our faith. It's about the greatness of the one.

In who our faith is in. It's about knowing who our God is. Knowing what he has said. Trusting in his promises. And living in the light of them. Leaning the whole way of our life.

Upon those promises. Trusting in every single word. That proceeds from the mouth of God. Now imagine that the readers. Of the letter to the Hebrews.

[30 : 28] See as they read Samson's name there. I bet you they were surprised. But I bet you as well. That they were greatly encouraged. And I think. As we read of Samson here. I think we should be greatly encouraged as well.

That God. In his almighty wisdom. In God. In his incredible grace. Uses flawed people of faith. For his purposes.

And as God's people. We are being invited this evening. To adopt that position of Samson. As we see him at the end of his life here. And humble ourselves. And throw ourselves in dependence upon our Lord.

I was at Edinburgh pastors lunch during the week. And we try and meet up. Three times. Four times a year.

Other pastors in the city. Just get together. Have a bit of a chat about what's going on. In our different churches. And just to pray for one another. It's just a wonderful time of fellowship together. And I always come away. Being so grateful.

[31 : 26] That God is people in this city. Well. Let me just tell you. We were sharing about what's going on. In our different churches. And a pastor. Who ministers not far from here. We asked him.

What's been going on in your church. How has God been at the work. And he said. Praise God for his grace. That things. For us are going so well. We're expanding our building.

Because it's full. Opportunities are opening up. For us to share Jesus in our community. We're starting our own church planting. Training academy. Things are going great.

But what amazes me most. Day after day. Is that despite my failures. And despite my huge ineptitude. God still chooses to work through me.

And I think that's where we should leave Samson this evening. Not trusting in our own greatness. Because there's not an awful lot. But trusting. And working. And living in light of the greatness of God.

[32 : 25] So would you have Samson in the Christian Hall of Fame? Praise God. Praise God. Praise God. That his ways are higher than our ways. Praise God. For his amazing patience.

And praise God. That in his grace. And because of his grace. His grace. Is so much bigger. Than our sin. He is a wonderful God.

And the story. Of Samson. Causes us to look at him. And marvel at him this evening. So spirit come. Put strength in every stride.

Give grace for every hurdle. That we may run. With faith to win the prize. Of a servant good and faithful. As saints of old.

Still line the way. Retelling triumphs of his grace. We hear their calls. And hunger for the day. When with Christ.

[33 : 22] We will stand. In glory. Amen. Why don't we just before we close. And pray. And sing our final song. Why don't we just take a moment. And let's just reflect.

In the quietness of our own hearts. On what God has. Been speaking to us about this evening. And so gracious God.

And loving heavenly Father. We would. Still ourselves Lord. At the. Coming to the end of our service. Our time together this evening. And we would want to declare. That you are God in heaven.

And we are on earth. And Father. We really do praise you. For your incredible grace. And the patience that you show us. As your people day after day. After day.

And so Lord. I ask that your spirit. Would be at work. In our lives. And our hearts this week. Father. That he would be working. To draw. Our minds. Off of ourselves. And to fix our minds.

[34 : 20] On your precious son. Jesus Christ. Prone to wander. Lord. I feel it. Prone to leave. The one I love. Here's my heart.

Take it. And seal it. And seal it. For your courts above. Amen.