

# Conquest & Judges

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

## Sermon 3: The Many Ways to Fail

Judges 13:1-25, 14:1-20, 15:1-20, 16:1-31

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- May 17, 2020

**Video Link to an introduction to the Book of Judges**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYy8iCfIJ4>

The Book of Judges: So, remember after Joshua led the tribe of Israel into the Promised Land he called them to be faithful to their covenant with God by obeying the commands of the Torah. And if they do this they will show all the other nations what God is like.

So, Judges begins with the death of Joshua and basically tells the story of Israel's total failure. The book's name comes from the type of leaders Israel had in this period. Before they had any kings, the tribes were all governed by these judges. Now don't think of a courtroom – these were regional, political, military leaders, more like a tribal chieftain. And you need to be warned: the Book of Judges is very disturbing and violent. It tells the tragic tale of Israel's moral corruption, its bad leadership, and basically, how they become no different than the Canaanites.

But this sad story is also meant to generate hope for the future. And you can see this in how the book's designed. There's a large introduction that sets the stage for Israel's failure if they don't drive out the remaining Canaanites. Then the large remaining section of the book has stories about the growing corruption of Israel's judges. And the progression here shows how Israel's leaders go from pretty good to okay to bad to worse. The concluding section is really disturbing and shows the corruption of the people of Israel as a whole.

So, let's dive in and we can explore each part a bit more. The opening section begins with the tribes of Israel in their territories in the Promised Land. And while Joshua defeated some key Canaanite towns, there is still a lot of land to be taken and lots of Canaanites living in those areas. And so, chapter 1 gives a long list of Canaanite groups and towns that Israel just failed to drive out from the land.

Now, remember: the whole point of driving out the Canaanites was to avoid their moral corruption and their way of worshiping the gods through child sacrifice. God had called Israel to be a holy people and that does not happen.

Chapter 2 describes how Israel just moved in alongside the Canaanites and adopted all their cultural and religious practices. And it's right here that the story stops. For nearly a whole chapter, the narrator gives us an overview of everything that's about to happen in the body of the book. This part of Israel's history, the narrator says, is a series of cycles moving in a downward spiral. So, Israel became like the Canaanites and they would sin against God. And so, God would allow them to be conquered and oppressed by the Canaanites. And eventually the Israelites would see the error of their ways and repent. So, God would raise up a deliverer in a judge from among Israel who would defeat the enemy and bring about an era of peace. But eventually Israel would sin again and it would all start over.

This cycle provides the literary design and flow for the next main section of the book. It gets repeated for each of the six main judges whose stories are told here.

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Well, good morning, Grace Covenant. It is great to be seen. Here we are another week together as we're going through the Bible story. We're reading through and hearing sermons about that. Honestly, one of the best resources to know the big picture of the Bible and to catch up with where we are or to remember where we've been is The Bible Project. That is the company that makes exceptional videos. So, please consider going there. That's actually who has

written our reading through the Bible program for us, and then they're providing these videos for us whenever we need them. So, go to their YouTube channel *The Bible Project*. Take a look.

## Introduction

Here's where we are in the storyline of God's redemptive work. Just quickly, it's in Deuteronomy we found out at the end of the exodus period that we are commanded to make sure we remember to obey the commands of the loving Father. And then Joshua comes on and the message there is to have courage to obey and you'll experience all the blessings of God.

And now we enter the Book of Judges. And in Judges they just keep forgetting over and over. Or maybe they don't have the courage to obey. I don't know, but it's like seven terrible funerals in a row. That's what it's like to read through the Book of Judges. And it's this downward cycle that descends into ruin. And why does that happen? Because they forget. They forget.

And as a matter of fact, you can see that the cycles that they're going through are about forty to fifty years apart. So why are they forgetting? Because the parents aren't passing along the rule of Deuteronomy to remember and the encouragement of Joshua to have courage to obey. And so, they just keep making the same mistake over and over again, and each generation has to learn things the hard way. But the hard way gets harder as the book progresses or digresses – whichever.

But there's another way of living life. It's right there in the Book of Deuteronomy chapter 6: "Hear, O Israel, and obey the command of God." *And then you're going to love how He fulfills the promises that He's given you in the land of milk and honey.* And then it goes on. "Hear, O Israel: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength. Write these commands on your heart," it says. "Impart them to your children. When you're sitting at home," -- when you're running errands -- "when you are laying down, where you are rising up." Keep these convictions passing on to generation after generation so they don't have to live the Book of Judges.

When I was writing this I was thinking, *Wait a minute. Grace Covenant Church is fifty years old. What are we doing about that? How are we remembering and passing on?*

I thought I'd just take a quick little application just for our church to let you know what we've been doing over the years. Most recently, every single ministry has strategically begun to invest in the men and women of that ministry in imparting the core values of our church – our beliefs and convictions. So, whether it's the men's ministry or the women's ministry or some of the other adult ministries here, but also the college students are invested in that context and even upperclassmen in the high school ministry. Two years ago we hired what's called the Table Group, Patrick Lencioni's famous management enterprise. We hired probably their best person for working with churches. He was one of the first employees for the Table Group. He looked at our workplace environment, scored us the highest church that he'd ever dealt with, and then in our year review with him, he said we did better than we did the previous year. Since our workplace was not needing too much tune up, he said, *Let's go on to the next part, and that is the communication and the clarification of your big values.* And so, Dan Walters, our moderator for the elder board, and our executive pastor Ray Anderson have been implementing clarification and communication of the core values of Grace.

So, when you keep hearing us say things like “Our purpose is to guide people to become like Christ in all of life” and “Relational discipleship is Spirit + Truth + Relationships”, that's the message that we're trying to pass down to another generation.

Another thing we've added because of the lessons we can learn from Deuteronomy and Joshua is this: three years ago we started bringing men onto our elder board to experience leadership in the context of being an elder. They were invited to nearly every meeting. And we wanted these guys to understand what it's like to serve in a church – the complexity, maybe sometimes the emotional stress, the stewardship of being a shepherd to a flock. And that's been a pretty big success for us.

Now this year, going into this year, one of the elders, Matt Pennies, has actually designed a curriculum that's more formal in that training, because it's our hope to bring on four more guys this coming fall to expand the number of elders on our elder board.

That's just our expression as a church of what we can learn from Deuteronomy and Joshua and how we can be warned by this book that we're looking at today called Judges. We're imparting our convictions and beliefs to the people that are younger than us.

There are many lessons in the Book of Judges. But there's this overarching lesson that continues to repeat itself purposefully. And the book itself, and particularly the storyline we're

going to look at today – Samson is like an archetype – the book itself and Samson – if it were a book by itself, this is what the cover of the book would look like. It would be “Mistakes ... it could be that the purpose in life is to be a warning to others.” That’s what Judges is about.

### **Context of the Book of Judges**

And when we look at the life of Samson, the context is --- I said earlier that Judges descends into moral depravity and their spiritual life is ruinous -- Samson is at the end of that descent.

#### **Judges 13:1**

**Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of YHWH, so YHWH delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.**

And in Judges 13:1: “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of YHWH, so YHWH delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.” There’s that forty years imprisonment again. And the question is, Has Israel hit their bottom? Are they at the end of that dead-end street yet? Is this it? Are they going to learn this time? Because now ... enter YHWH.

YHWH has this dramatic intervention in this place because now it’s gotten so bad it’s getting good. The story is that a barren woman is visited by an angel two times. And he says, “Though you’re barren, you’re going to have a child.” And Hebrews reading this storyline in the context of this book are saying, *At last*. This is a story that sounds like Abraham and Sarah being visited, or later on, Hannah getting a miraculous child.

### **Judges 13:3-5**

**The angel of YHWH appeared to her and said, “You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. <sup>4</sup>Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, <sup>5</sup>because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”**

Here’s our story. “The angel of YHWH appeared to her and said, ‘You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor shall be used on his head, because this boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.’” Wow.

### **The Nazirite Vow**

Now what is mentioned there is that “your son will be a Nazirite.” And let me explain this, because it’s critical to understanding the story itself. In the Old Testament there were a set of rules or prescriptions that God sets up and it’s called a Nazirite vow, because there are times or seasons where people will say, *I want to be separate and dedicated to the Lord*. So, the Lord says, *Yeah, okay, this is what this looks like*.

So, in Numbers chapter 6 it rolls out how you are to be in order to be set apart --- for God – set apart from the common. The first thing is --- it’s called a vow of separation to YHWH --- the first thing is that you don’t drink or eat anything from a grape. You don’t drink grape juice or wine. You don’t eat raisins or grapes or even the seeds or the skin. That’s a sign of your separateness to YHWH.

Another declaration of this vow, this vow of separation to YHWH, is that no razor touches your head. You don’t shave your face, you don’t cut your hair at all.

The third is this. This separation vow, the Nazirite vow to YHWH is that you don't go near anything that's dead. And it even says, "If your mother or father or sister or brother were to die, you can't get near that dead mammal. Stay away."

### **Numbers 6:8**

**Throughout the period of his/her separation he/she is consecrated to YHWH.**

And this vow is to show that you're separated to God for a purpose for a time. Look what it says in chapter 6, verse 8 of Numbers: "Throughout the period of his or her separation he or she will be consecrated to YHWH."

Now in almost every case that we find in the Bible, Old and New Testament, when people take a Nazirite vow, it's for a season. But when we read this story, we realize that not only is this a miraculous birth, but this is a big thing planned for Samson. His whole life will be an expression of a Nazirite vow. And it begins with his conception, with his mother being a Nazirite while she's having this child. And why is that? Because God has big plans for this man Samson – to deliver Israel from the Philistines. God is going to separate him. He is to be separated to YHWH, and in that he's supposed to stay away from grapes, he's supposed to not cut his hair, he's supposed to never go near a dead animal. Separated for this purpose; God loves Samson and has wonderful plans for his life. Just go along, Samson ... just be God's man. God is providing for Israel a hero.

### **Samson Is a Picture of Israel and Is Like Us**

Now, to understand this story, listen carefully. Samson is Israel. Samson is a picture of Israel. Watch this as we go through, because you're going to see that what he does is what Israel's story is. And wait ... let's add something ... Samson is like us.

**O mirror of our fickle state ...**

**--- John Milton**

John Milton says this about Samson: “O mirror of our fickle state...” God loves Samson and has a wonderful plan for his life. God loves Israel and has a wonderful plan for the nation. God loves you and me and has a wonderful plan for our life. And we need to make sure that we remember to obey and have the courage to obey, or we could end up like Samson. So, while we go through this storyline, let’s make sure that we have the mirror handy.

### **Samson’s Power**

Let’s look at the displays of raw power of this person that’s set apart for the special purpose of God, this exhibition of power. It happens rapid fire, one chapter after another.

#### **Judges 14:5-6**

**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.**

Chapter 14, Samson’s walking down a path and a roaring lion comes to attack him. And the Bible says, “And the Spirit of YHWH came upon him with power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat.” I’ve never torn a goat apart, but boy, he did it just like a young goat and leaves it there on the side of the road.

#### **Judges 15:14-16**

**... the Philistines came toward him shouting. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power ... <sup>16</sup> Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.**

Next chapter, Samson is ambushed by a thousand Philistines. And he picks up the jawbone of a donkey – look what it says – “The Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit



of the Lord came upon him in power ... Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.” Samson writes a little song to sing on the way home from this slaughter. He says,

“With a donkey’s jawbone  
I have made donkeys of them.  
With a donkey’s jawbone  
I killed thousand men.”

Then in chapter 16 he finds himself in a major city in the Philistines’ land, like a capital city. It’s called Gaza. And while he’s there he falls asleep. And the people of Gaza realize that Samson’s sleeping. And they say, *Let’s close the gates and lock the gates and seal him in here. And in the morning, we’ll kill him.* Well, Samson gets up in the middle of the night and kind of sees what’s going on and listen to what he does. He grabs the gates – the city is only as strong as its gates, so you can imagine how fortified a major city would be with these gates. He takes the doors off the rails and puts them down. Then it says he ripped the posts out of the ground. And then the crossbeam that keeps it tight, the lock, the latch – he puts that on top of the doors on top of the posts. And then he puts that on his shoulders and carried it thirty-eight miles uphill and leaves it there. Why? Why didn’t he just leave? Because it’s going to take four oxcart crews to walk thirty-eight miles, and those men are going to have to load those doors and the posts, the crossbar, and come home for thirty-eight miles. And the whole time no one’s saying a word, but everyone’s thinking the same thing: *Don’t mess with Samson. God has special plans for him.*

God loved Samson and had wonderful plans for his life. But Samson either doesn’t know about his weaknesses and passions or doesn’t care.

### **Proverbs 16:32**

**Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.**

I think Proverbs 16:32 was written for him, or at least with him in mind. It says, “Better a patient person” – in his case, I would say “Stronger is a patient person than a warrior. The one with self-control is stronger than the one who takes a city.” Sure, he’s strong. But Samson serves

Samson. Samson is an example of the many different ways a person can ruin their life, even though God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their life.

And his story, the way that it's written, is supposed to show us, because he's like Israel, none of his mistakes are "one and done". He's a repeat offender. He keeps making the same mistake over and over again. *Quit falling into the same hole! Walk around it!* And he doesn't. He doesn't.

### Introduction to Samson's Life

This is Samson's formal introduction to who he is. This is chapter 14, verse 1. This is how we know what kind of man he is. "And Samson went to town of Timnah and he saw a woman in Timnah and it was one of the daughters of the Philistines. So, he came back and he told his father and mother and said, 'I saw this woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me to be my wife.'"

Well, you would imagine the father and the mother protested this and said, " 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among your own tribe, or among all the people of Israel, that you have to go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?'"

#### Judges 14:2

**But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."**

Here's his whole worldview. "And Samson said to his father, 'Go and get her for me, she looks good to me.'" *She looks good to me.* The parents are thinking, *Really, Samson? In all of Israel you can't find one woman that could be your wife?* He wants this woman because he can't have this woman. He wants what he can't have. He does whatever is right in his own eyes.

### Samson's View of God

You know, we say around here – I bet you've heard it a hundred times – What you think about God is the most important thing about you. When you look at how Samson thinks about God, it's very important. He has all these outward signs of a Nazarite vow, to be separated to God. But he doesn't care to be used by God. He actually uses God. He's supposed to be set apart

from the people; he wants to be like everyone else. And he's just going to use God. All his God-given gain, all this supernatural strength that he had, he uses it just for himself. He doesn't care about anyone else and he doesn't care about glorifying God. That's his view of God. And you watch how he systematically unravels and violates each one of his vows, his Nazarite vows to be separated to YHWH for a purpose.

### **Breaking His Vow: Drinking Wine**

Remember this Philistine woman? He ends up getting married to her and at the wedding – it's in the Philistine town ---at a giant vineyard he spends a whole week at a wine-chugging event with his Philistine in-law groomsmen, violating that commitment to stay away from the grapes. And do you know why he was drinking wine all week with his Philistine in-laws? Because it looked good to him. And he did what was right in his own eyes.

### **Breaking His Vow: Contact with a Dead Body**

The next vow was staying away from dead animals. Remember that cool story where he grabs that lion and tears it apart like a goat? Well, he comes by that same path later on and he sees the carcass of that lion and it has been decomposing and some bees came and made a hive out of it. And he sees in that hive honey. And so, he reaches down and scoops up a whole lot of this honey and starts eating it, digesting this honey, takes it home to his parents, gives it to them so that they might be violated by something unclean, doesn't tell them about it. Do you know why he ate honey from a dead carcass that he's supposed to stay away from? Do you know why he did that? Because it looked good to him. And Samson did whatever seemed right in his own eyes. Samson has no power over his appetite. And it doesn't appear that he even cares about it. Every single altercation he had with the Philistines where he put himself in danger was a result of his passions. He was in places where he wasn't supposed to be in the first place. Three times that he has these encounters with the Philistines, all three times he's with a woman, a Philistine woman, a person he's not supposed to be with. And each time he's falling into the same hole. And he won't go around it.

## **The Women in Samson's Life**

Let me just summarize the women of Samson, the women in his life – all Philistine women. The first one, his wife, that's what leads to the violation of the grapes where he's drinking all that wine. The second one – remember he tears the gates out of Gaza, that major city? You know why he was in Gaza sleeping? He was visiting a Philistine prostitute.

### **Proverbs 16:32**

**Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.**

And the third woman in his life – we know her name – Delilah. Samson and Delilah. Have I read Proverbs 16:32 yet? I don't know – let's look at it again. “Better” – stronger – “is a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.” Samson just took a city single handedly. He'd be stronger if he had just a little bit of self-control.

Delilah – her name literally means “the weak one.” And the passage says this: “And Samson loved Delilah.” Well, Delilah loved money. And she is offered pretty much a lifetime of money to entice him – remember that – to entice Samson to find the secret of his strength.

## **Breaking His Vow: Cutting His Hair**

And in this storyline – it's a metaphor – his hair is the secret of his strength, his long flowing hair. It's the last sign of his Nazarite vow that he is set apart to YHWH for this purpose. And again, Delilah is enticing him. One time: “How can you be like any other man?” And he tells her something and it doesn't work. Second time: “How can you be like any other man, Samson?” He tells her something that's not true and it doesn't work. Three times – she says, “Samson, tell me how you can become like any other man?” And it doesn't work.

And now, let's go – full court press from the weak one. “How can you say ‘I love you’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times now and you have not told me the secret of your great strength.” So here it comes.

### **Judges 16:16-17**

**It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.<sup>17</sup> So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, “A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man.”**

“And it came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed unto death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, ‘A razor has never come upon my head for I have been a Nazirite to God’ – to YHWH – “from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak like any other man.””

Dramatic music. He was separated to God, separate to God. If they cut his hair, he’ll be separated from God. It’s just a picture. If you cut off his hair, you will cut him off from YHWH. And he tells her that, because that’s how he can become like everyone else. She is told to entice him. She entices Samson.

There’s the word “entice.” The Hebrew word means “to find an opening,” a point of vulnerability. *Hey, Paris – aim your arrow at Achilles’ heel. Yeah. That’s where he’s weak. It’s the only place he’s weak.*

Our enemies often know our weaknesses better than we do. They take them seriously. Three times Samson is confronted brawn for brawn with the Philistines. And each time the Philistines are slaughtered, humiliated, routed, and mocked. So, somewhere they had a meeting where they say, *Hey, we keep shooting cannonballs at this man and he punches right through them.* And maybe some intern said, *Hey, I got an idea. Why don’t we send – I don’t know – a pretty little lady at him.* And they do. And he is putty in her hands. He does whatever he’s told.

**James 1:14**

**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lusts.**

James talks about enticing: “Let each of you is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lusts” – enticed by their own lusts. The Greek word for “entice” means “luring with bait.” You want to catch fish? Ask any novice fisherman and they’ll tell you, you’ve got to choose the right bait and you’re going to have to know how to tease those fish to want that bait. That’s what enticing means here. He’s been enticed. He’s been played. He doesn’t have a chance against this weak one.

The rest of the story goes like this. His hair is representing this and that’s all that’s left that shows that he’s been separated to God and for God. And this is kind of the climax of his storyline – what is the greatest warrior in the Book of Judges with the most important brawl that he’s ever going to have? How does Samson fight in this one? He doesn’t. He sleeps through it.

**James 16:19**

**After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.**

Looks what the passage says: “After putting him to sleep in her lap, she called for someone to shave off his hair, and so began to subdue him. And all his strength left him.” All that God had for Samson is lost. And do you know why? Because it looked good to Samson. And Samson did whatever was right in his own eyes.

And now it doesn’t look like his eyes are going to last long. Because the story continues. Now that he’s weak and like any other man, it says – it’s progressive – they seize him, gouge out his eyes – no more lusting after our Philistine women – and then they take him to Gaza, friends. Guess what? They’re still repairing the gates that he tore down. They take him to Gaza, the place where he humiliated them. They bring him there and they bind him with shackles and put him on

a millstone so that he can grind wheat for them like an ox, like the ox that he is. That's what's happening.

### **Samson's Last Stand**

And then it says in verse 22 of chapter 16, "But his hair began to grow back." Wait, the story apparently is not over yet. But here's the last scene. They bring him to Gaza and then they had this huge celebration and this party. But look what he's reduced to. "And the rulers of the Philistines assembled to sacrifice to their god Dagon to celebrate that 'Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.' Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers from all the Philistine cities were there, even on the roof. Total there were three thousand men and women gathered there."

#### **Judges 16:25**

**While they were there in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.**

And look what it says: "And while they were there in high spirits, they shouted, 'Bring us Samson so that he can entertain us.' And so they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them."

He went from judge to jester. His name means "little son." And now his whole world is dark. He was blind to his passions and now he's literally blind. People, I'm sure, were screaming, "Hey, Samson, you traded your Nazirite vow for your eyes. You want that back? I bet you do." There is no single person in the 400 years of judges that falls further than Samson. Great potential. God loved Samson and had wonderful things planned for his life. But that's not what Samson wanted.

## **Judges 16:28**

**Then Samson prayed to YHWH, “Sovereign YHWH, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.”**

The story continues where Samson arranged himself to be put between two pillars and he prays one of his only two prayers. He says, “Oh, sovereign YHWH, remember me please, God, and strengthen me just this one more time. Let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” Even in his prayer he’s not thinking of the glory of God or the safety of Israel. *I just want to get revenge for them taking my eyes from me.* So, you know what? They put him between the pillars and he pushes them away and he says, “Let the Philistines die with me.” Here’s what’s on his gravestone. This is the epitaph for his life. *He did more dying for God did he ever did living for God.* That’s some funeral.

## **Summary**

Let’s just remember that Samson is a mirror. Samson’s life is a picture of Israel in the Book of Judges, and he was a holy man. They were supposed to be a holy nation. He wanted to be like everyone else. Israel wants to be like everyone else. He sought foreign women. They sought foreign gods. And why? Because it looked good to them. They did whatever they wanted in their own eyes, anything that was right in their own eyes.

But Samson is a mirror for us too. We can be like Samson. That’s the lesson in here. Is it any wonder that when Jesus is teaching us to pray in Matthew chapter 6, He says this part: “Deliver us from temptation and then deliver us from the evil one.” In Matthew’s book it says, “Deliver us from the evil one” – temptation. Deliver us from temptation – that’s our bent. We’re each bent towards certain temptations more than other people. We more easily fail – deliver us from those temptations. Because “Deliver us from the evil one” – the evil one is the devil. It’s Satan. And boy, he knows how to fish. He knows what bait to use and he knows how to entice us to want to take that bait. Do you know? Do you know what your bent is? The devil does.

A stronghold is a phrase we use in church and it’s in the Bible, and it is a choice. It requires permission on your part. And what’s happening in a stronghold is you’re in a place



where you have a temptation, it's a bent, and you ignore it. The devil doesn't. And you're fundamentally, actively or passively, "deliver us into temptation," not "deliver us from temptation." There are a lot of appetites to choose from. And again, we have particular ones to ourselves. Knowing that is important.

C. S. Lewis does a marvelous job of summarizing the various appetites of our soul and flesh and kind of puts them into two categories. Let me read it to you, because it's kind of a warning to us if we just think Samson's about physical temptations. Lewis says this: "The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing, and back-biting, the pleasures of power, the pleasure of hatred." He said, "... the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are the ones in real danger." He says, "I fight a war on two fronts."

**They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.**

**---- C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity***

Watch this quote. "There's the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither."

I just wanted you to see that sometimes the sins and the temptations that are happening in our soul, these diabolical sins, are the ones that we need to be really concerned about. It's a picture here. The evil one knows this about us. Deliver us from temptation and deliver us from the evil one. If you can imagine the evil one having a conversation, maybe training a young demon on how to do this, how to select the bait.

And the young demon says, "You know, we've been throwing all sorts of hardship and difficulties and even physical injury at this person and they just keep getting back up and they don't curse God."

And then the devil says, "Try giving them a promotion. See what happens then."

Or "This young lady, we've put her in some terrible work situations, dreadful bosses, toxic environments. And yet she still trusts God."

“Why don’t you – I don’t know – give her her own company? See what happens when she thinks she has power or she thinks she can write the rules. Then watch. You’re going to enjoy that.”

A stronghold is when we have a bent toward a temptation and we ignore it and the devil doesn’t. And we invite ways to deliver us into temptation.

I just want to conclude that in my experience, I have found that people just don’t – we are like Samson. And we are ignorant or ignore our weaknesses, our temptation. I mean, it seems like the last person that is involved in a plotline that is filled with sorrow or hopelessness or dread --- the last person that ought to be reading that or listening to that music or watching that on television is the very person that is doing that very thing. The last person that should be entertained by revenge media is the very person that thinks that they should be in charge of giving out justice. The person that seems to be tempted most by being afraid is the one who spends the most time watching the news. Why keep falling into the same hole? Don’t be Samson.

Self-righteous perfectionism has destroyed far more relationships than adultery ever did. The diabolical you, right, the thing that’s inside of me that should be most concerning to me, are the things that make me feel like I can do whatever’s right in my own eyes.

God loves you. Remember this. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. He really does. And you’re going to love what He does with your life if you remember the commands and put them in your heart. If you choose to have the courage to obey, it’ll be greater than you could ever ask or imagine. Your obedient dependence on the Lord will glorify God. That’s what will glorify God. And that’s the meaning and the purpose of all creation – to glorify God. Let’s not be Samson.

Let’s do this. As a church, all over the city, maybe the country or the world, why don’t we all pray together the Lord’s Prayer? We’ll use the word “debt” instead of “trespass.” Okay? So, join me. Let’s bow our heads and pray.

*Our Father who are in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, thine is the power, thine is the glory, forever and ever. And all God’s people said .. amen.*

Thank you, Grace. It’s been great to share this moment with you.

