



Judges: When Gifts Eclipse Character

Lesson 8: March 3rd and 4th

Read Judges 15

Sermon Reflection Question: What captured your attention from Sunday's sermon?

Observation & Interpretation:

We know enough about Samson by now to know that he is unlikely to respond peaceably to his fiancée marrying another man...

1. From Judges 15:1–8, how do Samson and the Philistines behavior in these verses contribute to a cycle of increased violence?
2. Samson burns the fields because he was denied his wife; the Philistines burn his wife because he burned their fields. Why are humans prone to choose "eye-for-an-eye" vengeance instead of the "turn the other cheek" grace that Jesus commands?
3. Samson's strength was a gift from the Holy Spirit, yet he often used it to settle personal scores. In what ways are followers of Christ prone to use spiritual gifting (leadership, teaching, or serving) for personal ends rather than serving the body of Christ? (Ephesians 4:12).
4. Read Galatians 5:16-26. Looking at Samson's interactions with the Philistines in this section, what is the cost of exercising spiritual power without the accompaniment of the Spirit's tempering fruit?

5. Read Judges 15:9-13. What is the Philistines' goal and whose side does the tribe of Judah prove to be on? Why?

They may bear the name of God's people, but Judah would rather live at peace with the world and worship their idols than be freed to worship God—and they would rather cut down their own rescuer than risk confrontation with the Philistines.

Reflection & Application:

6. Why is assimilation into the surrounding culture so attractive for churches, and for individual believers? How do you feel that pressure in your own life?

Observation & Interpretation:

7. Read Judges 15:14-20. Why is Samson able to escape and who does Samson give credit to for his victory?

In verse 18, Samson (for the first time) speaks to the God who has chosen him, and empowered him. But his prayer is neither humble nor faithful; he basically demands that God helps him, and complains that God isn't doing so- and yet God still graciously provides for his needs.

Reflection & Application:

8. Consider your prayer life. What does it look like to pray as a child of God with thankfulness and humility?
9. How does the performance of Christ—His perfect obedience and sacrifice—free us from the exhausting need to prove our worth through our own intellectual or spiritual achievements?

10. Samson's downfall began with his appetite. In an age of instant gratification and digital temptation (like pornography or mindless consumerism), how does Samson's impulsive behavior serve as a warning for our own behavior in our current cultural moment?

11. How are you using your God given spiritual gifts to build up your local church community?

Fasting Reflection:

RELAX: Take a moment to relax. Close your eyes and breathe deeply - inhaling slowly, then exhaling slowly. Repeat this several times as you imagine yourself coming into God's presence. As you finish and get ready to read, pray something simple like "Lord, speak to me through the words of your gospel. Amen."

READ. Read this story about Jesus two times. Read slowly, pausing at the line breaks:

John 15:1-8

I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you.

For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.

But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

REFLECT. After the reading, take some time to reflect in silence on one or more of the following questions:

- What word or words in this passage caught your attention?
- What in this passage comforted you?
- What in this passage challenged you?
- What is God inviting you into?

RESPOND. Read the scripture passage one more time. Bring to the Lord the praise, petition, questions, or thanksgiving that the Word inspires in you.

REST. Soak in the moment, rest in it, don't rush through it. Do you sense anything that Jesus is inviting you to know, see, believe, or do? Pray: Thank you God for meeting with me in this time. Give me courage and faith to follow you this day.