

The Hall of Faith: Samson

Hebrews 11:32

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 30, 2023

Good morning. Robert already mentioned that we had a great time last weekend at our Principles of a Healthy Church Conference. And one thing that came out of that, for those of you that were able to be a part of it, we talked about the subject of unity and fellowship and the church coming together. And one thing that in the conversations was brought up, that could always help our church is communication, always working on better and better communication. We do try very hard to communicate to the congregation through things like our website and social media. We do things like announcements, bulletins, things like that. But there's always more to do in that department. And so one thing we're going to start doing here in the near future is we're calling it quarterly church meetings. Just about four times a year, set aside time to come together after church and just talk about some events that are going on in the life of the church. We'll do kind of a review of the past several months to talk about what has been done. And then just give us an opportunity to discuss just different shepherding items and things like that, just to foster that communication. So keep that in mind. The first one we have in the bulletin here will be on June 4. So just mark that on your calendars. We'll just do it after church, it'd be similar to a business meeting in some ways, but it won't have all the financial kinds of things that we do; it'll be a lot more personal than that. So and, if you guys have any other ideas for ways to communicate, that's an open conversation too. So we just want to work on that as a church for the sake of unity, and that Christ would be glorified in that.

And this morning, we are going to get into the Word of God. Before we do though, I just want to have a word of prayer with you. So if you would, let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we always want to be growing in our unity and fellowship in the body of Christ. And the reason we do that Lord is because we know it pleases You. You made it very clear that You want Your church to be one just as You are one with the Son. And that Christ is exalted in all things. And so we pray for our church as we make strides in that area, always wanting to grow in that. And as we come this morning to the Word of God, we have been blessed with the music. We've been blessed with the fellowship that we have enjoyed and blessed with hearing Your Scriptures read and times of prayer. But we want our eyes to be open, Lord. We just humbly ask that You would show us new things in Your word, especially as we talk about this interesting character of Samson, someone in the Bible I think we can identify with because of his weaknesses. But at the same time, Lord, we want to learn the biblical lessons of his life so that Christ would be exalted and His word would dwell deep in our souls. We pray this in Christ's name and for His glory. Amen.

Well, this morning, we are coming to the next person in the Hall of Faith and that is Samson. I had several people tell me that I can't finish this study until we talk about Samson. And in order to introduce him to you, I want you to open your Bibles to the book of Judges because this is where we're introduced to Samson. His story begins in Judges chapter 13. If you want to turn there with me in your Bibles, I just

want to read this to you. Judges chapter 13:1. By the way, Samson has a lot of nicknames if you're interested in this kind of thing. He's been called the human wrecking ball; everywhere he went, he just wrecked things. He's also been called the Bible's caveman, kind of had a lot of caveman qualities about him. But here's where our introduction to this man comes up in chapter 13. It says,

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.

There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

And we'll find out later on down to the end of the chapter, verse 24, that the woman gave birth to his son and named him Samson.

And just explain that to you, if you notice, verse one tells you the setting for this when it says that "Now the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." And that's an important phrase because it's mentioned a lot in the book of Judges. Because the Bible tells us that after the people of Israel left the wilderness, in the book of Joshua, the Lord told them to conquer the promised land, and they did it. He instructed them to take it over, and they obeyed. The problem is they didn't do it all the way because they left a lot of the original inhabitants still alive. So as a result, the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. Now, what that means is that when those inhabitants were left alive, the Jews saw what they were doing, and they copied it. And they watched the inhabitants bow down to their gods and worship their idols and give sacrifices to these demonic things. And they said, "Hmm, that looks interesting to me." So they tried it themselves and bowed down too. And so the Lord allowed other nations to conquer them. He got so fed up with the Jews and their behavior that He said, "If you like these other people's gods so much, fine, you can have them." And as a result, verse one says here, that He gave them into the hands of the Philistines.

And that referred to one of the nomadic tribes living in Palestine at the time. Because the Jews lived in a desert, which was populated by bands of itinerant people who made a living by sweeping into neighbouring communities, and stealing, killing, and pillaging everything in sight. The way it works is they would move into a certain place and take it over and steal your sheep and cattle. Or they would come into another one and steal your money and jewels. Or go into another one and steal your women and children, take all your food and practice what was known as a starved earth policy where they would consume everything in sight.

Which is why the angel of the Lord appeared to this woman in verse three and said she would conceive and bear a son who would begin to deliver Israel. That means this child would be the rescuer. He would be the one that God would send in order to put an end to all the suffering. In the words of this book, he would be a judge or a *shafat* in Hebrew. It doesn't refer to someone you would see if you went to the courthouse today and watched the trial, it refers to a ruler, or someone who would judge with a sword in their hands. Because if you remember what's going on here, God wanted the people of the land to be killed, He wanted the Jews to leave no one alive. So when they didn't do it, He sent in men like this to carry on the work of destruction. That was a judge's job. They weren't there to make peace and friends with everybody. And they weren't in the land to argue or reason or have a cup of coffee in order to start a dialogue and understand them better. They were put there to kill these people and take up a sword and wipe them out. Because the Jews were compromising, and it was the judge's job to draw them back.

And the way the angel tells Samson's parents to prepare for this is noteworthy because he says in verse four, "Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite." What's that all about? Well, a Nazirite refers to someone who was to separate themselves unto the Lord by setting everything else in their life aside, to focus on Him. Numbers chapter six, if you want to write that verse down, says when a man or woman made the Nazarite vow, they did it to dedicate themselves to God, that was the purpose of it. It was done as a form of worship and separation. So you would focus all your attentions and have no distractions and think about Yahweh. As you can see, in this passage, when someone made this vow, they had to do three things. They had to abstain from wine in order to demonstrate they were going to avoid anything that might tempt them to sin or cloud their judgment. And they had to avoid contact with a dead body so as not to contract defilement. That's what happened when you touched a corpse in the Old Covenant, it made you unclean so you could not worship with everybody else. And so the Nazarite avoided that. And it also refers to here, they would refrain from cutting their hair or letting a razor touch their head. Not always sure exactly what that was about. One idea is that it was to show that we're not concerned with outward things, which is how Samson was supposed to live. That's how his parents were supposed to raise him in order to prepare him to be a judge in Israel. The only problem is, it didn't quite work out that way.

If you're familiar with the story of Samson, he did not really fulfill the Nazaritic vow because he was a very sinful man. In fact, you might say he was one of the worst ones in the book of Judges. One commentator said John MacArthur said "The fact that Samson from birth was to be separated, had little effect on how he actually lived. Because he would violate all three of the rules for a Nazarite. He would touch the dead body of a lion in Judges 14. He would probably presumably drink wine at his wedding feast in Judges 14. And he would also allow his head to be shaved in Judges 16, or at least he would put himself in a position to do that, which would lead to his demise. The whole thing brought about his premature death because he compromised. "He kind of reminds you, Samson does, of the man who goes to church every week and prays and tithes and reads his Bible only to go to work on Monday and forget

it. Only to walk right into the office the next day and throw it out the window because he starts to swear and curse and cuss like everybody else. His relationship with God was just an outward thing for him. I mean, if you've read his story before, it seems like every time you turn around, he's doing something wrong. He tried to marry a Philistine. He's supposed to be killing the Philistines; he tries to marry one. That's about as wrong as you can get. Then he sleeps with a prostitute. And he turns around and sleeps with another woman he wasn't married to, which makes you wonder why he's in the Hall of Faith, doesn't it? And you really question what's going on here? And the answer is because he believed. He just had to make a lot of mistakes first. You guys have heard of the school of hard knocks, where you just keep making the same errors over and over and over again; you learn the hard way: that Samson. He was a bullheaded man. And that brings you back to the book of Hebrews. So if you want to look in the Hall of Faith, in Hebrews chapter 11. This is where Samson shows up because it says this in Hebrews 11:30. It says,

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

When the author mentions Gideon and Barak and Samson, there, he's mentioning the people from the time of the Judges. I've told you before the Hall of Faith can be divided into four phases. The first one is the antediluvian period, which covers the lives of Abel, Enoch and Noah who lived before the flood. And the second phase is the patriarchal phase which covers the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are the patriarchs or fathers of Israel. The next one is the beginning of Israel as a nation, which covers the lives of Moses and Rahab. And then the next one is the judges and kings, which are all mentioned in verse 32. The reason the author puts them all together is because he's wrapping things up at this point in the chapter, and he's tying them off. But before he finishes it out, he says, "I can't leave these people out because no one trusted in God more than the judges." They did some amazing things in His name. They conquered kingdoms and shut the mouths of lions and quenched the power of fire. When you read the book of Judges, there's story after story in here of times when the Jews are outnumbered, and they're about to lose everything, and they're going to be decimated until one man steps up and changes it. One person shows courage and saves them because he had faith. It happened simply because he trusted in the Lord.

And as you come to this part of the Hall of Faith, you have to talk about this one person, Samson, because he didn't use an army to do that; he did it himself. He was like a tank that went around destroying things and leaving a trail of devastation in his wake. He was like that wrecking ball I described that would wreck things wherever he went. He was a truly interesting figure. The only

problem was, it seems like every time you read about him, he's breaking the law and sinning against the Lord, with a woman after woman after woman and situation after situation. But he did believe in his final hours because Samson's life reminds you it's never too late to repent. And no matter who you are, what you've done, you're never too far gone to get right with God. As long as there's breath, there's hope.

And let's talk about that this morning. What I want to do this morning is talk about several things that led up to Sampson's great moment of faith. When you're studying this man, you find that all throughout his life, you don't see faith. You see all kinds of other things, issues, problems. But at the end of the life, he did believe. And so there's several things that led up to this one great moment of faith in his life at the end. And let me talk about these with you.

The first one is his failed marriage. The first thing that led up to Samson's great moment of faith at the end of his life, is his failed marriage, which refers to the time when he tried to get married and it didn't work. The whole thing crashed and burned. And you see this back in the book of Judges. So if you want to turn back there with me, we're going to spend most of our time in this book. Because after talking about Samson's birth in chapter 13, the author continues the story in chapter 14. And what he says is pretty discouraging. Because it says this in Judges 14:1, it says,

Then Samson, remember this child that was supposed to be a Nazirite, this person who was set aside to deliver the Jews,

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me."

He was a man of few words, the Samson. That even sounds awkward in Hebrew, by the way. Just to say a little bit about this, verse one tells you what this story is about when it says that Samson saw one of the daughters of the Philistines and wanted to marry her. Now remember, the Philistines are one of these nomadic peoples that are troubling the Jews. And they're going around and raiding and pillaging and burning their land, and stealing their money and jewels, and stealing their food, and stealing their women and children, which makes what Samson does here seem so bizarre, because he sees one of their daughters and says, "Get her for me." In other words, "I want you to arrange a marriage with that woman because she looks good to me." Now think about that for a moment. The Philistines are Israel's enemies, and Samson is set apart to kill them. They're causing all these problems, and it's his job to stop it. And what does he do here? He wants to join them. He wants to bring one of them home with him. Why? What's going on here? Well it's his lust. Not that hard to figure out here. He's doing it simply because of his physical desires. A key word here is the word "saw," which means Samson saw this

woman, and that's all he's thinking about. He looked at her appearance, and that's the only thing he has an interest in. This is the kind of man he was at this stage of life.

Verse four says this happened because God was about to shake Samson out of his apathy and use this as an occasion against the Philistines. In other words, he's going to provoke him to fight. But Samson didn't know that here. All Samson is thinking about is his flesh. And in order to provoke him, verse 10, tells the story this way. For the sake of time, we have to skip over a few things. But verse 10, says that,

Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

Now, I skipped over a few things here, but I wanted to read this to you because it gives you the backdrop of what's going to happen. It tells you how Sampson prepared to marry this girl, and that was by holding a wedding feast. As part of the preparations for a marriage back then it was customary for the groom to hold a big banquet for everyone to attend. In fact, it was more than that, because this wasn't a banquet like we have today that occurs shortly after the ceremony, and it wraps up after a few hours. This was a banquet that lasted for a whole week. It was a long-drawn-out affair that included things like dances and parties and games and speeches and that type of thing. These were small towns; they were intimate communities, so everybody would be invited. If you did this in Chilliwack, it was expected for the whole village to show up. Which turned into a gong show for Samson because it says when he entered the land of the Philistines, they gave him 30 companions. Now that could be because he was a Jew, and they didn't trust him; and so these 30 men were there to look on him with suspicion and make sure he didn't do anything wrong. Or it could be these 30 men were there to serve as bodyguards, so the rest of the Philistines didn't mess with them. But whatever the case is, as a way to have fun with them, Samson tells them a riddle. And he says that if they guess it, he'll give them 30 linen wraps, or 30 changes of clothing to go along with each of the 30 men. And the riddle if you remember, it goes like this.

Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet.

Now the problem is they couldn't guess it. Nobody could. They had no idea what it meant. And so as the story goes on, they go to his fiancée and trouble her about it. In fact, verse 15, says that they tell his fiancée, "Entice your husband so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?" It tells you the kind of world they lived in, they would kill her over something like this. And the next verse says that she wept before him, which was not a good way to start a marriage, right? I mean, this sounds pretty ominous. In fact, not only does she weep, but it goes on to say that she wept for seven days while the feast occurred, because she just kept crying and crying and crying, and nagging and nagging and nagging him, until eventually he gave in and told her what it meant. She told the companions; they come back and tell him. And verse

19 says this is his response. We are getting to something here. This is how the Lord provoked him to fight. It says, "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house." Now what that means is on account of what they did, Samson flew into a murderous rage, and went on the warpath. And he went to a village several miles away, killed enough people to get the clothes off of them, took them back and gave them to the man who cheated him. Because that's how the Lord worked in his life to get him to do something about the Philistines. He did it with a failed marriage.

Because if you remember the whole story here, Samson wants to go through with it, right? I mean, he wants to marry this girl, start a life with her, set up house, until the Lord steps in and stops him and makes him remember his calling. He's supposed to be a judge. It's his job to take up the sword and fight. And when he doesn't do it, the Lord has to orchestrate things in such a way that it changes his mind.

In fact, when you read the story, there's a phrase that's repeated several times in the passage. And it's the phrase "The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him." You see it in verse six when Samson killed the lion. And you see it in verse 19 when he goes to the village of Ashkelon, because the idea is Samson couldn't do this in his own strength. There's no way he could kill a lion by himself, so the Holy Spirit did it through him. Some people ask the question, is the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Old Testament? And the answer is a yes, He is. You see it here. He came upon men like this to do special tasks. The Bible tells us that He came upon Joshua when he led the people into the promised land, and He came upon Gideon, right before the battle with the Midianites. He came upon a man named Bezaleel when he made items for the tabernacle. And He comes upon Samson here.

Because all throughout his life, you're going to see the Lord's calling Samson to do this, but Samson wanted to do that. And the Lord told him to kill the Philistines and slay them and put them to death; but this man wanted to compromise and play buddy buddy with them, so the Lord frustrated his plans. God does that sometimes, doesn't He? Sometimes He frustrates our plans in order to keep us from getting what we want. In His mercy and kindness and goodness towards us, He blocks our paths so our will will coincide with His will, because we want to marry this person, and God says no. Some of you've been married so long, you don't remember what it was like to date. But I'm guessing when you were dating, they were probably people you wanted to marry, and God didn't let you. That was His mercy in your life. Or we want to hang out with these people, and God says no. We want to be friends with the Philistines. We want to commit this sin, give into this temptation, indulge in this evil thing. God says, "No, no, no. I won't let you," because He's merciful. He's keeping you from ruining your life.

When I went to seminary, I had a pastor friend who told me he said, "Jeremy, I don't know how your life will turn out." And this is a southern guy, so this is a southern expression. But he said, "I know that God will kill your darlings. He's going to take the idols out of your life, so you'll have nothing else to find

comfort in but Him.” This is the Lord killing Samson's darlings, so that He could help this man which brings it to another thing that led up to Samson's great moment of faith.

And that is the story of his failed attempt to reconcile with this girl. So after failing at the marriage, another thing that leads up to his moment of faith is his failed attempt to reconcile with this girl after he leaves her.

Samson tries to go back after all this happens. And he's turned down when he does. If you look in chapter 15, it tells us that after Samson went away in a huff. Verse one says he went back to her in order to bring her a young goat. That's because Samson was very romantic. I say that in jest. I don't recommend that if you upset your fiance, you should bring her a goat. That's not biblical. Bring her flowers or something. But the reason he did this was because this was a normal way to reconcile back then. If you did something wrong and offended someone, you could make it right by bringing them a source of meat or something like that. That's what the goat was for, which is what Samson does here. It also says he had another motive in doing this as well, because he said to himself, “I will go into my wife in her room,” which was a delicate way of saying he wanted to be intimate with her, which shows you how far he's fallen. You'd have to be pretty foolish to want to do that after leaving someone at a wedding face. He's not even married to her yet. But Samson does this because his mind is being entrapped with lust. And as he approaches her, verse one says her father said, “I really thought you hated her intensely, so I gave her to your companion.” In the Hebrew that kind of translates like this, I really thought you hated her with an immense hatred.” In other words, “You didn't want her, so I gave her to the next guy.” Which was the reasonable thing to do in that culture; that wasn't wrong in that world.

But Samson doesn't see it that way because verse three says this. It says,

Samson then said to them, “This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm.” Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails. When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves.

Now to give you some insight into this, the word for “fox” here can be translated jackal. That's probably what this is referring to. Because jackals were very common in that part of the world. They are a small coyote like creature with black and brown fur that stands to feed off the ground, it weighs about 30 pounds. They were scavengers that would eat things other animals killed because the way it works is that when a lion killed a goat or something, he would gorge itself on the main parts of the flesh and leave the rest for the jackals to come along later and pick at it at night. Which made them fast; they were hard to catch. And here it says Samson caught 300 of them. If you're wondering how he did that, well the answer is he did it the same way he killed the lion: with the power of God. This is another miracle this man does. He does it with the Lord's help. And when it says he ties them tail to tail and put the

torches there. He did that because way back, if you look up in verse one, it says this was the time of the wheat harvest when the fields were full of crops and dry because it hadn't rained in a while. The land of Israel always went through a drought this time of year, so one little spark would have set the whole thing ablaze. And that's what happens because verse five says as the jackals zigzag through the fields and run here and there and everywhere with those torches with them, they burned up everything. The shocks, the grain, the vineyards, olive groves, leaving the whole place devastated.

And so the Philistines asked, "Who did this?" They're told Samson did it, so they capture his father-in-law and his fiancée and burn them alive. Which infuriated Samson so much verse seven says he goes down and struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter. Now we don't know how many he kills there. It doesn't tell us but if you look up after this fight verse 15 says he went on to engage in another battle where he killed a thousand of them with a donkey's jawbone. Now, I don't know if you know much about ancient warfare, but people did not typically fight with the donkey's jawbone. The idea was that Samson looked on the ground for the closest object he could find, and he reached down and saw this, and started swinging with it. You could even say it's not only a miracle that he killed a thousand Philistines with it, it's a miracle the jawbone held together through all that carnage. Any bone would break at some point, but this one didn't because the Lord was watching over it.

In fact, verse 14 even tells you that the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him here. And there you see that phrase repeated again, which means that Samson was not fighting on his own initiative. He was doing it under the control of the Spirit of God because whether he knew it or not, the Lord was turning this man into a killing machine. I mean, it's one thing to kill a thousand men with a gun or a bomb or something like that. It's another thing to kill a thousand men in hand-to-hand combat. That's a level of violence and brutality that's hard for us to fathom, and that's what this is describing. In fact, there's a pattern that's repeated here and in the preceding passage, as well. And that is that Samson tries to sin, and the Lord says, "No," so Samson flies into a rage and kills the Philistines. And then Samson tries to sin again, and the Lord says, "No," and so he flies into a rage again and kills even more. Then he tries to run away from it in this passage and live in the cleft of the rock of Elam, and the Lord doesn't let him do that either.

One commentator said this part of the story really highlights the sovereignty of God in this man's life because Samson was at fault here; there's nothing commendable about what he did. But the Lord even so used it to accomplish His will. Samson meant it for evil; God meant it for good. Proverbs 16:9 says, "The heart of man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps." Which means God is the one who's directing Samson here and calling the shots even though he doesn't know it. He tries to marry this woman and sins and doing so, then he goes back to her again and sins again. And God still took it and used it to defeat his enemies because the Lord was sovereign over his life. And it brings you to another thing that leads up to his great moment of faith.

And that is the time he tore the doors off of Gaza. We are building up to the final moment of his life, but I want you to see all the different things that happened with him or get a summary of them. Because another thing that leads up to this final moment is the time he tore the doors off of Gaza, which refers to the time he visits another woman. And I won't say much about this one; there's no need to. Other than if you look in chapter 16:1. This shows you the power of Samson. Because it says,

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him." Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.

Now when you read that, it doesn't strike you as any big deal. But it actually was because of when it says that Samson took hold of the doors of the city gate, that means he pulled up two doors that would have weighed several hundred pounds each or maybe close to a thousand. Because these weren't doors like you see at the back of the room today. They were doors like you would find at a military fortress. That's what Gaza was. It was locked since it was located close to the sea. Gaza was a walled in town that was built to withstand the siege. If you remember, when we talked about the city of Jericho, I told you the walls of Jericho were several storeys tall and six feet thick because they were meant to withhold an invading army. That's the same way here. So Samson pulled up two objects that would have just dwarfed him in size. In fact, they were so big, it would have made him look like an ant carrying a breadcrumb. We have ants in our house right now, so this is very personal for me to talk about. They always invite their friends, don't they? You never find one. And so one interesting thing about ants is that they're very impressive creatures because when they're picking up a piece of food, you don't see the ant under the food: it's just the food moving down. That's what this was like. These doors were who knows how tall, but they were so massive, all you would see if you looked from an aerial view is the door moving. Which is probably why the Philistines did not attack Samson as he does this because they were terrified. The whole thing had to have scared them.

The passage also says he carries them from Gaza to the top of a mountain that was opposite Hebron. And if you look at that on a map, that's a distance of 38 miles at an incline of several thousand feet. Because Gaza is by the ocean at sea level, and Hebron or the mountains there are about 3,000 feet above sea level. So this was just a tremendous journey. Some scholars have speculated as to why he did this, and the answer is we don't really know as far as why he took them that far. It could be that it took him that long to cool off because he was so mad. So he's just walking and walking and walking and fuming and fuming and fuming all the way up that incline. Or it could be that he was doing this to make a statement to the Philistines and to say, "You guys are weak. I mean, here I am taking the gates of one of your most important cities, and you can't do anything to stop me. And I'm walking through your

territory, and you can't touch me." But it just shows you another one of the amazing things Samson could do. He could take an object like that and lift it as if it were nothing.

You know, one thing I find is very interesting here too is you don't read in this passage that the people of Israel saw that and fought. And the Jews watched him do that and stood up to the Philistines and drove them out of the land. You don't read that at all. Here's Samson, this Superman type character doing this, and Israel does nothing to help him to show you the wretched state they were in. Some people today say, "I will believe in God, if I see a miracle." The truth is you won't. Jews saw a miracle here, or they heard about it anyway. But they didn't believe; they would rather hold on to their sin. It's the same way now when people reject Christ.

Which brings us to another thing that leads up to his moment of faith. And this is the episode with Delilah, might be one of the most infamous parts of the story here. But a third thing that led to Samson's moment of faith is the whole episode with Delilah, which refers to the time when he visits another woman because this guy's life was like a broken record. He just keeps making the same mistakes over and over again. He's like a child that kept putting his hand next to the stove and getting it burnt. Because after visiting the prostitute, chapter 16 says he takes up with another lady named Delilah who's not a prostitute at least, she's never called that in here. But she was a pretty evil woman.

Because verse five says she was in league with the Philistines, who offered her 1,100 pieces of silver each to betray Samson. Now, we don't know how much money that was because we don't know how many lords of the Philistines were there to visit her. But if this refers to the lords of the major cities of Philistia, there would have been five of them. There were five major cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashta, Gath and Ecron. And if that was the case, the sum of money would have been 15. That would have been 5,500 pieces of silver, which was a tremendous amount of money. It shows you how much they hated Samson to come to him and make this kind of arrangement. And if you look at what happens next in verse six, I want to read this whole story to you so you can hear it out loud in its own words. Verse six says,

So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and [b]how you may be bound to afflict you." Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man." Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound." He said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man." So Delilah took new ropes

and bound him with them and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.

Then Delilah said to Samson, “Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies;”

He's the only one at fault here by the way, being sarcastic,

“tell me how you may be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man.” So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web]. And she fastened it with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.” It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. 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.”

When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. She said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes;

That story is pretty self-explanatory, isn't it? But one thing I want you to see, as you read it, is the relentless pressure of this woman. Did you catch that? See how many times she pressured Samson to tell him his secret; tell her his secrets. I counted four times. She does it in verse 6, verse 10, verse 13, and verse 15, she says, “Please tell me where your strength lies. Please tell me how you can be bound? How can you say, ‘I love you?’” And also, did you notice how many times Samson gave into it? It's four times as well. He does it in verse 7, verse 11, verse 13, and verse 17, because he's like a lamb being led to the slaughter here or a sheep on the way to the butcher's block. He's about to be captured. He doesn't know it.

And one more thing to point out is that all throughout this story, he never forgets about his Nazirite vow. Did you catch that? Verse 17 says after Delilah nagged him the fourth time, Samson told her that “a razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite from my mother's womb.” And when you read that, after reading all the other stuff we've talked about, you have to ask the question, “Seriously? Samson, you still think you're a Nazirite after all this? You still think you're separate unto God because of your hair? You're sleeping with prostitutes. You're letting your rage consume you. You're living for lust. And the only thing you have to point out is the fact that a razor has never touched your head. What is that?”

And the reason he's acting this way is because this is a deceived person. This is somebody who thought it's okay to sleep with a prostitute just as long as you take care of your hair. And it's okay to be with an adulterous as long as you just do some outward things, which is so twisted. But before you're too hard on him, let me just ask how many people do the same thing today in the church? I mean, how many Christians do you know think it's okay to lust after someone so long as they come in here on Sunday. Or fantasize about a person they're not married to as long as they read their Bible and go to care groups and spend time with other Christians. It happens all the time.

We live in a very lust ridden culture today. Several years ago, a survey was sent to the House of Commons here in Canada, in which they discovered that the pornography industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry in this country that pulls in about \$97 billion annually. That's more money that's made than any other form of entertainment, including the movie industry and the NHL. They also found that half of all internet users look it up on a regular basis, and it's responsible for about 25% of all searches on the web. Which means every time someone opens up a Google page or something like that, one out of every four searches is looking for filth. And that's unbelievable because it's a government study; that wasn't put together by the church. But I would say, I think we would all say, so much of that is found its way into the church. And the thing that makes it so sad is the deception of it all because people give into lust when they think that it will give them something better than God will. And they indulge in this sin when they think it will satisfy them in a way Christ never could. And that is wrong because it can't. Nothing satisfies your soul like Christ. Nothing blesses you like the Lord. But you have to be on guard.

Samson was not on guard in his life. He was totally spiritually apathetic. It's been said, “Sin will always take you farther than you want to go and make you give more than you want to pay, and it will give you nothing in return.” That was Samson's life. He gave everything for Delilah, what did she give him in return? Nothing. Lust always does that. Which would be a terrible way to end this story, by the way. I mean, to be honest, it would be a discouraging way to wrap it up. With Samson being defeated like this and humiliated and captured by the enemies of God.

But the good news is that the story doesn't end there. Because there's one more thing that led up to Samson's moment of faith, and that is the time of his death. A final thing that leads to Samson's great moment of faith is the time of his death, which refers to the time he goes to jail after this and suffers at

the hands of his enemies. But instead of giving into despair, Samson calls out in the name of the Lord. By the way, you know, there's only one time in this story, that I could find, when Samson prays. It's right before he dies. And that's what this is about here.

Because it says that after doing all these things, the Philistines get the upper hand on him. They capture Samson. After killing 30 of them in Ashkelon, an untold number of them later, and a thousand of them with a donkey jawbone, they finally seize him after Delilah tricks him. And as they do that, they gouge out his eyes, if you look in verse 21, it talks about that; that may sound kind of harsh, but it was a standard military procedure back then. Anytime an army captured a dangerous prisoner, in order to ensure they wouldn't escape, they would always maim him in some way. They could cripple him, they could amputate something, they could blind him. Those are brutal times. And it says they took him to Gaza in the same verse, which was the place where he tore the gates off the city earlier. They took him back there, probably to show everyone in the town that the great enemy had been defeated. And they placed him in prison and make him work as a grinder. That refers to the person that would push a wooden bar that was connected to a heavy stone wheel that went round and round in order to grind up grain and turn it into flour. It was boring work. It was so monotonous because you just walked in circles all day, they would give it to the lowest slave. And that's what Samson had become here. He's at the bottom of the barrel in their society.

And if you look in verse 23, it says.

Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said,

“Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.”

When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said,

“Our god has given our enemy into our hands,
Even the destroyer of our country,
Who has slain many of us.”

It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, “Call for Samson, that he may amuse us.” So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.

When it mentions their god, Dagon here, that was a hideous creature with the body of a fish and the face of a man because the Philistines were sea people, and they made their living fishing. So they created their god like that. And here it says they attribute the capture of Samson to him because they looked at the battle with Samson as a battle between their god and his God. This wasn't just a war between Israel

and Philistines. This was a war between Dagon and Yahweh. And they believed Dagon had won because Samson was defeated. In fact, in order to show you how much they feared Samson, it says they gave a great sacrifice to Dagon. We don't know what that would have consisted of, whether sheep or bulls or goats, but it was bigger than usual. And they say, "Our god has given Samson into his hands." Not us, but our god. This was all an issue of religion for them.

And in order to express their pride over taking him as prisoner, it says they called him out to entertain them. Now there's some debate as to what that looked like. But it could be they entertained him by making fun of him because he couldn't see. So they would play games with him and hit him and say, "Who hit you, great warrior?" And things like that. Or they would throw things at him. Or it could be that they amused themselves by asking him to do feats of strength. And ask him to lift things and pull things and break things so they could watch him do it. But whatever the case, the point is, they're treating him like a circus act. He's just a plaything to them now, with 3,000 of them, it says later on, watching from the rooftop.

And while that's going on, verse 22 says something interesting, because it says, "However," or right above this, "the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off." Now what that means is that Samson was starting to keep his vow again, while they're doing this. And while they left him in prison and had him grinding at the mill with his eyes gouged out, the Nazirite vow was coming back into place in his life. And this time, it seems like he really meant it because he was starting to focus on the Lord like he was supposed to do in the beginning. Remember, his life starts with that vow, now it's going to end with it. And it began where his focus was supposed to be on the Lord. Now it's going to wrap up that way. And verse 29, tells you what happens, as all this is taking place. It says,

Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with [p]all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.

Now, that's the great end of Samson, the strong man of God. This is where everything builds up to in the passage. His final moments.

One commentator said he brought the house down on top of him at his death, and he went out with a bang. And if you're wondering how, archaeological evidence from a time period indicates that the Philistine temples were built with large roofs, that were supported by wooden columns, that were planted on short cylindrical foundation stone. And so that the central columns were set close together as the main support of the building, and everything kind of went out from there. From an engineering perspective, that means that the weight of the perimeter would be drawn to the central spots to hold the weight. And so if one of those pillars gave way, the rest of the roof would collapse underneath it. The

interesting thing about the story is Samson didn't know that because he couldn't see. He didn't know where he was. But apparently, as he's performing in the middle of this temple, they propped him up on those columns. And in one final moment of desperation, he took his hands and just pushed the closest thing he had available to him. And the whole building collapsed on account of his strength.

As I just mentioned to you, verse 28 says he did this after praying. Which is the first time he does it in the book. The rest of the time, he's ignoring God; he's so proud. He thought he could do anything on his own. But now things are different, because this is a humble and broken and contrite man. This is a shattered individual who has nothing to be proud of anymore, and in that moment of great sorrow, Samson talks to God and He says, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged," and God answers his prayer in the most profound way imaginable. Because this is where you see Samson's faith stand out. If you're wondering why this guy is in the Hall of Faith, this is why.

It's been said you can learn a lot about a man by the way he dies. And you can tell a lot about what's on his mind by the way he goes out of this world. This is what was on Samson's mind at the end. Like the thief on the cross after living a life of sin for all these years, he finally repents, and the prodigal son comes home.

And as he does, it teaches you the lesson. And the lesson is that even if you failed God like Samson did, there is still hope for you. And even if you've blown it, and sinned, and messed up over and over again in your life, there is something you can do in the final moments, and that is to pray. You can call out to God and He'll hear you. Our God is a God of grace. He loves to show mercy. Even remember the story of the prodigal son, the son goes out and sins and parties and does wicked awful things. And then in a moment of desperation, he says, "I'll go back to my father and beg him," and when he goes back to the father, what does the father do? Does he say, "Get out of my face?" Does he say, "I can't stand you after what you did?" He runs to him. That's how God responds to sinners who repent. He brings them into His family.

I mention that because as I tell this story of Samson, there may be some of you this morning who have said, "I can relate to this, pastor Jeremy. My life has been like Samson's. I've made mistake after mistake. I've committed one sin after another. What do I do?" You pray. That's the answer. You need to call out to God. If you want forgiveness, ask Him for forgiveness. If you need mercy, you beg Him for mercy. If you want to help to overcome your sin, ask Him for that; He'll provide it. Some of you say "Well, Well, Pastor, you don't know what I've done." It's true. I don't know what you've done. I have no idea. But was it as bad as this? I don't think too many of us have lived a life worse than Samson's. And if God forgave him, God will forgive you. In fact, while we're talking about this, I want to tell you, you have an even greater reason to call out to God this morning. And that is because you're living on this side of the cross. You know the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Saviour for our sin. Samson didn't know Him yet. Christ had not come at this time in history, but Christ has come.

In fact, if you want to go back to the book of Hebrews, you can see this mentioned here, because this is how the author closes out the Hall of Faith. We read this earlier during our Scripture reading time. But he says this in Hebrews 12. He says,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

When the author mentions the great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, what he's referring to there is the great cloud of witnesses that we've been talking about in the Hall of Faith. These people like Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, and, Jephthah, when you think about them, this is what it needs to cause you to do. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Because He came to fulfill what they stood for. He was the Saviour that was to come. In fact, it says here, He endured the cross, which means He bore the pain of it. He persevered through all the agony and horror and terror of Golgotha. And He despised the shame, which means He disregarded the humiliation of it for the joy set before Him because the joy was more important to Him than the shame was. And the thought of your salvation was greater to Him than the agony because He wanted to be the author and perfecter of your faith. Which means He wanted to start and finish your faith. He wanted to do everything that was necessary for you to be forgiven. So if you're wondering this morning, "What do I do if I've lived a life like Samson?" You fix your eyes on Jesus Christ. Don't fix your eyes on your sin. Don't fix your eyes on all the terrible things you've done. You look to the cross. It says here that you're running a race and when you run a race, you don't stare at your feet. You don't stare at the other runners. You look at the finish line. The cross is the great finish line for us.

Listen friends, the story of Samson is a sad one because everything in his life was a failure up to this point. He tried to get married, and it failed. He tried to have relationships with people, and they failed. Tried to keep a vow, he failed. Tried to be a judge, he failed. Just one failure after the next. But he was forgiven because he did one thing, right. And that was to believe. You needed to do the same thing as well.

Next week, we're going to finish up the Hall of Faith by talking about David, the man after God's own heart. The reason it ties off, ends with him and this other man Samuel is because they were great examples of faith in the Bible. Unlike Samson, they were very positive examples. So please come back and join us for that.

This morning, you know, I wanted to tell you a story that I think I've told a couple of times in the life of our church, but I think it's very fitting for this type of subject. But there was a story of the time a father became estranged from his son, they got into a fight, and they separated in Spain. And the father

searched for his son for months and never could find him. And so finally, in a last desperate effort to locate him, he put an ad in a Madrid newspaper, and the ad said this, it said, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven, and I love you. Your father." And on that Saturday, 800 Pacos showed up to be forgiven by their father. And my friends, I tell you that because there's a little bit of Samson in all of us. We can all relate to the story of the Pacos. But you can be forgiven if you turn to the cross this morning. Let me close us in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we are so overwhelmed today by studying about Your grace, and the life of a man who just didn't get it. He was a very dense individual it seems like, Father, and there was so much of his life, we can't even understand that somebody would do all these things. And yet You showed us such lavish grace in his life at the end.

Father, thank You for the grace You've given us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for the mercy that has been poured out upon us through His shed blood on the cross, His victorious resurrection from the tomb, His ascension to the Father, and His high priestly ministry even now. All these things are just grace upon grace upon grace for us.

And, Lord, I pray if there's any here this morning who are discouraged in the battle with sin, that this would remind them where they need to put their attention. Father, we do need to repent of sins, we need to turn from them and be zealous in guarding them. But as we turn away from them, we have to turn to the source of salvation.

Lord, thank You for the reminder in the Hall of Faith. Lord, we pray that we would take these things to heart. We want to be a joyful people. At the same time, we mourn over sin, we grieve over it. But we are overjoyed at what Christ has done for us as we sing about that, Lord now, and as we go off to our care groups, we pray Christ will be glorified in the ministries of the church. May all these things give us a deeper appreciation of His grace and mercy and kindness every day. And we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.