

Judges 16B

- There's an old saying about a woman scorned...you probably know how it ends
 - Twice now Samson has scorned a Philistine woman named Delilah
 - Showing his lustful weakness again, Samson took a liking to her
 - Leading the Philistines to believe they finally had their opportunity learn the secret to Samson's strength
 - They asked Delilah to learn what made Samson so strong.
 - So she simply asked Samson to reveal the secret
 - But Samson gave her false answers on two separate occasions
 - Samson's tricks left Delilah unhappy, to say the least
 - But Samson's success also left him increasingly cocky thinking he could endlessly outsmart his enemies
 - We stopped for a time to wonder why Samson would even be willing to play this dangerous game
 - I concluded that he has assumed his strength would never leave him
 - He presumed that the Lord had nothing to say about how he put his gift to use
 - He has no fear of the Lord
 - So he continues to play around with evil
 - In spite of Delilah's first two attempts, Samson continues to toy with her as she seeks a way to defeat him
 - Samson continues to test God's patience to a breaking point

Judg. 16:13 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; 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 for a third time she asks him how he can be defeated

- This time Samson brings her very close to the true answer by turning her focus to his hair
 - Remember, a Nazarite was never to cut any hair on his body as part of his vow of consecration to serve God
 - By this time in Samson's life, his hair must have been quite long
- Samson mentions "seven locks" of hair, which suggests his hair was braided into seven lengths probably to keep it manageable
 - Samson tells this woman that if his hair was to be woven by a loom and left locked into the loom with a pin, he would become weak
 - This is the most ridiculous proposal yet by Samson
 - It's surprising Delilah even bought it
 - But it's getting dangerously close to the true answer
- Samson is taking bigger risks as he gambles with the Lord's patience
 - We're left with the impression that Samson's has become bored with easy victories and a lack of worthy adversary
 - So he's willing to walk up to the edge with his enemy just for the thrill
- Remember, the source of Samson's power is not the length of his hair or even his Nazarite vow
 - His power is a gift of God made possible by the Spirit of God
 - Therefore the Lord appointed to serve His purpose
 - And the Lord may withdraw that power at any time
 - But Samson hasn't given much thought to that prospect
 - He's playing with fire assuming he can never be burned
- This is the inherent danger of being used in a mighty way by God
 - The most the Lord chooses to accomplish through us, the greater the danger we may one day wake up and think it's all us
 - We see the amazing things happening around us and through us

- Maybe it's a personal ministry that reaches millions people
- Leading a person to be filled with pride to think they have something special within them that's responsible for the success
- And at that point, they stop serving the Lord and start serving themselves
- And they test the Lord's patience...how long will He tolerate such prideful self-delusion and reclaim His glory?
- But just as often we see this pattern happening in the "big fish in a small pond" scenario
 - An Sunday school teacher, a deacon, an elder, a church secretary...someone who has opportunities to serve the kingdom
 - They have been equipped and placed in a position to serve Christ and His sheep
 - And one day they wake up and conclude that God's sheep exist to serve them
 - They forget their place as their pride and ego take the place of the servant's heart God requires
- This scenario can play out a million ways, so we must all take great care as we seek to use the gifts and opportunities the Lord appoints
 - To put it simply, it's not about us
 - It's about Christ
 - But if and when we miss that fact and begin to misuse the opportunities the Lord gives, then we're testing the Lord's patience
 - And in that moment, we're like Samson toying with Delilah daring her to find a way to discover our weakness
 - And if don't repent, sooner or later the Lord may let Delilah have her way so that we are brought low

Judg. 16:14 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.

- So Delilah find a chance while Samson is sleeping to weave his hair
 - The reference to him sleeping gives us a clue to what's truly going on here
 - If Samson is sleeping in a woman's presence, then it's likely he has been enjoying her company in an intimate sense
 - If so, then perhaps Samson has been willing to play along with her schemes so that he might gain access to her bedroom
 - He continues to propose false answers to prolong this relationship and ensure continued access to her
 - Once again, his fleshly weakness is leading him down a path of self-destruction
 - So as Samson sleeps she weaves his hair
 - Samson is clearly enjoying making a fool of her
 - And he's acting as if he's immortal
- But of course, weaving his hair isn't the secret, so when the trap is sprung on Samson he escapes
 - I'm not sure which Philistines Delilah was to recruit to ambush Samson this time
 - I'm sure word was out about Samson's trickery
 - So we might think the Philistines would be wary of trying to ambush Samson a third time
 - But evidently some still were willing to try
 - Only to be disappointed again
- Of course, weaving Samson's hair hasn't the answer
 - His power came from the Spirit's anointing, not from anything physical
 - Samson enjoyed that anointing from birth
 - And it was given in connection with a Nazarite vow
 - That vow centered on three restrictions, two of which Samson has already violated

- So we can say that in this moment Samson's vow to serve God was hanging by a single thread
- But the purpose of his vow wasn't so that Samson would have miraculous power
 - Rather, Samson's observance of his vow was to be evidence of a heart dedicated to living a life for God's purposes
 - This of the gas gauge in your car
 - When that gauge points to Empty, the car is going to stop
 - But the gauge doesn't control whether or not your car runs
- Similarly, Samson's willingness to abide by his vows didn't control his power
 - His vow was an indication of whether he was willing to serve the Lord
 - His willingness to keep his vow indicated he was willing to serve the Lord with his gifting
 - But over the years, we've seen him setting aside those restrictions to serve his flesh
 - And this setting aside was like a gas gauge moving to empty
 - It was evidence of his slipping commitment to serving the Lord
- Therefore, if Samson would not serve the Lord with the power the Lord gave him, then there was no longer a reason for the Lord to equipment him so mightily
 - All that remains at this point his his vow not to cut his hair
 - He's already tossed aside two thirds of what marked him as a servant of the Living God
 - And it's no coincidence that he's found himself in the bedroom of a Philistines woman working to defeat him
 - Sin's deceitfulness has clouded Samson's judgment and deadened his conscience
 - Each step away from God has left him weaker and more enslaved to his fleshly desires

- So now he's so bored and so cocky and so enslaved by his lustful desires that he's willing to risk breaking the final vow
- The moment we decide we can enjoy the pleasures of sin while also enjoying the privileges of serving the Lord is the moment we begin to go it alone
 - We just don't know it right away
 - And this is where we find Samson's heart

Judg. 16:15 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."

Judg. 16:16 It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.

Judg. 16:17 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."

- Delilah comes back a fourth time asking for the secret
 - She is pressing him daily with her words pleading with him for the answer
 - The Hebrew says literally that Samson's life was shortened to the point of death
 - It gets to the point that her nagging begins to annoy Samson to death (no amens from the husbands, please)
 - This reminds us of the earlier moment when a crying woman convinced him to give up the answer to the riddle
 - As strong as Samson maybe on the outside, he's obviously weak spiritually and emotionally
 - Such that merely a crying or nagging woman is enough to cause him to turn away from the Lord
 - Samson willingly forfeited his dignity and power to someone who had no right to have it and no power to compel him
 - In the end, he gives up information that will lead to his own death

- Ironically, he's so worried about being nagged to death that he's willing to risk literal death
- How foolish can a man be?
- He tells her that if she cuts his hair, he's done, and notice in v.17 we're told This is what lies in Samson's heart
 - In other words, Samson speaks as he truly believes
 - Samson is indicating he feels it's his hair that has given him his strength
 - He feels that so long as he doesn't break the final part of his Nazarite vow, he is invincible
 - It seems Samson recognized he had already broken his other vows leaving only one remaining
 - And he's resting in this final vow
 - Notice he doesn't say the power comes from the anointing of God
 - Samson has come to think that the source of his power was something he controlled, something about himself
 - But his Nazarite vows were simply an outward display of an inward commitment to serving the Lord
 - The vows themselves weren't the source of his gifting
 - They were the signs of his gifting
 - His statement is further evidence that he has left God behind
 - His view is barely different than a pagan's view of their gods
 - Pagans lived as if they possessed a degree of control over their gods based on what they said or did to please their gods
 - If they did the right things, and their gods would respond in predictable ways to bless them
 - Like a genie in a bottle, rub it the right way and get your wish
- Obviously, this is not how the Living God works
 - He has plans and purposes of His own, in which He graciously allows us to participate

- We don't manipulate, control or otherwise cause God to do anything that He wasn't already inclined to do
- In fact, our relationship with the Lord is exactly the opposite of the pagan view
- The Lord calls upon His children to obey His word, and we must respond to see His pleasure
- Samson has forgotten these things
 - He's forgotten that it's not his hair that assures him of his strength and success
 - It was the Lord's Spirit working in him
 - God gave Samson that gift to ensure Samson's success in accomplishing great things for the Lord and His people
- Therefore, his power would only persist so long as He set his mind to serving the Lord
 - As he has set aside each of his vows, Samson has moved farther away from serving the Lord
 - And because of his departure from the Lord, the Lord will withdraw His Spirit and with Him, Samson's power
- Why did Samson take this risk in the first place?
 - I can only assume Samson couldn't imagine how the Philistines would ever be in a position to hold him down long enough to cut his hair
 - Samson would simply use his strength to prevent them from getting that opportunity
 - But he was forgetting that the Lord has the power to bring about any circumstances, especially one's we can't foresee
 - Persistent sin can lead a person to conclude that there are no consequences for our choices
 - We come to believe we can handle whatever sin brings our way
 - That's what Paul means when he speaks of the deceitfulness of sin
 - Our sin nature lies even to ourselves about what it will bring

- In the end, Samson's sinful pride lied in telling him he could control the situation no matter what he told Delilah
 - So the Lord brings about circumstances to permit Samson's hair to be cut despite his strength to prevent it
 - The Lord used Samson's pride and lust to bring him down

Judg. 16:18 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.

Judg. 16:19 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.

Judg. 16:20 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.

Judg. 16:21 Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.

- Delilah for her part recognizes that there was something different in Samson's story this time
 - She sensed that this time he spoke a true statement, so she persuades the Philistines men to bring money and prepare to defeat Samson
 - So a woman who previously kissed Samson will now betray him into the hands of his enemies for pieces of silver
 - In v.19 we're told she makes him to sleep on her knees, which again suggests an intimate situation
 - So it seems that Samson got what he wanted, then Delilah set about getting what she wanted
 - She calls a man into the room to cut his hair
 - Evidently Samson is a sound sleeper, because he sleeps through having his hair shaved off
 - Or perhaps Samson has been drinking again?
- As soon as his hair was gone, Delilah began to afflict Samson we're told
 - It seems the Philistines made Delilah be the first to test Samson's strength this time

- And as Delilah begins to afflict Samson, Samson awakes to discover his enemies upon him
- At first he thinks to himself that he will just defeat them as usual
- So notice Samson isn't aware at first that his strength has gone
 - It's not as though he can feel the working of the Holy Spirit inside him
 - He only discovers the situation has changed when he goes to work in the power of God
- Notice at the end of v.20 Samson's weakness was the result of the Spirit leaving him, not his hair being cut
 - Now certainly, the Lord's decision to depart is connected to the hair
 - But this only as a confirmation of what was in Samson's heart
 - When he gave Delilah the secret in his heart, Samson was choosing Delilah over his commitment to serve the Lord
 - And so that became the moment the Lord chose to make an example of Samson by withdrawing the Spirit
- Gary Inrig said:

"Forty years, Samson had kept one part of his vow. He had broken all the other parts, but he had kept his hair unshaven, as a sign of his commitment to God. He had not made a very strong commitment or felt a deep faith, but he had trusted God at least in this. There was no magic in his hair. It was only a symbol of his separation to God. But if his hair was shaved, Samson's feeble dedication would crumble completely. "

- As Samson illustrates, men don't sense the Holy Spirit in us as a general rule
 - Instead, we see the Lord's power reflected in the fruit of His work both in us and through us
 - His hand in our efforts will be evident to us and others as we put our shoulder to the work He appoints
 - That work may be difficult, of course
 - But the results will testify to the Lord's power working in us

- On the other hand, should we ever decide we can work without the Lord, as Samson has done, we won't necessarily detect a change at first
 - Achievements accomplished with merely human effort can still look impressive
 - While a man speaking with the power of God can fill a stadium with worshippers
 - So can a man speaking lying and seductive words of worldly wisdom
 - So it can be hard to tell the difference between the two, especially if we only judge by physical appearances
- This is Samson's situation at this moment
 - He's been living in his flesh, acting by his own will and failing to carry out the will of God
 - Yet he's still achieved impressive results, at least in physical terms
- But eventually, the difference will become apparent as the fruit of our effort plays out to conclusion
 - The work we accomplish in our own power won't produce lasting spiritual growth
 - It only serves to increase pride, arrogance and selfishness
 - Ultimately, it doesn't glorify the Lord
 - This is Samson
- So when the Lord withdraws His Spirit, Samson doesn't realize at first that he's now alone and without God's power
 - Only when he sought to accomplish the work God assigned him does he discover he can't do it
 - The task was now too much for him
 - The very thing Samson was equipped to accomplish, the very thing his life was devoted to accomplishing was now the very thing he couldn't do

- Samson possessed this strength his whole life, but didn't use it to glorify the Lord
 - So the Lord's Spirit departed from him
 - Because even God's patience has a limit
 - The God of our Bible loves irony, or so it would seem, and this is the ultimate irony in the story of Samson
 - Because Samson wouldn't do what he was commanded to do for God's glory, God prevented him from doing the very same thing when Samson chose to do it for his own glory
- The Lord allowed the Philistines to exact a series of severe and symbolic punishments upon Samson
 - First, the Lord matched Samson's spiritual weakness with physical weakness
 - Samson has lost his amazing strength
 - Secondly, the Lord matched Samson's spiritual blindness with physical blindness when the Philistines gouge out Samson's eyes
 - Samson's greatest weakness was going astray whenever a Philistine woman caught his eye
 - So the Lord eliminated Samson's ability to sin in that way
 - He will never again be able to find lustful pleasure in looking upon a woman
 - Finally, Samson becomes a slave in bondage to the Philistines
 - Samson was a slave spiritually to his sin
 - Now he sits in physical chains grinding grain
 - Grinding a hand mill was the hardest and lowest form of slave labor in the ancient world
 - It was mind-numbing and considered humiliating, since it was the work of a female servant
- It would be easy to feel sympathy for Samson at this point, but don't forget all that he did to bring himself to this point
 - For years he has put aside the calling of God to pursue his own desires

- He had a unique role to judge Israel
- And he possessed unique abilities to defeat Israel's enemies
- And yet he did virtually nothing to bring about that result
- Instead, he toyed with the enemy and dared the Lord to do something about
- We can't test the Lord forever in this way and not expect severe consequences
 - These consequences were intended to teach Samson the error of his behavior
 - And at the same time to make Samson an example to the rest of us
 - That to whom much is given, much is expected
- Notice the differences in Samson's life compared to past judges
 - Past judges may have failed in one way or another
 - But in the end, they defeated their enemies and lived securely in the land of Israel, to varying degrees
 - But now the pattern has completely broken apart
 - Samson never raises an army
 - He hasn't defeated the Philistines
 - And in the end, he can't even preserve himself, or so it seems at this point
 - He's the defeated, not the victor
 - Samson is emblematic of the entire nation of Israel
 - From the birth of this nation at Mt Sinai, the Jewish people have lived under a special calling from God
 - They were given great power to defeat superior nations and promises of great blessing
 - Had they lived in light of that calling, they could never be defeated

- But when they began to seek for relationships with the world rather than with the Lord, they grew weaker
- To the point that now they are under their enemy's power
- Nevertheless, the Lord has not departed from Israel, and at the first sign of repentance, He has been faithful to restore them each time
 - And so it goes in the story of Samson as well

Judg. 16:22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

- While he's sitting in prison, his hair begins to grow back
- Samson's hair has become a useful symbol in this story
- When Samson's hair was cut, it became a symbol for his spiritual unfaithfulness to the Lord
- Likewise, Samson's hair now becomes a symbol of Samson's heart turning back to the Lord
- It's been said that there is no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole
 - Meaning when a person comes to the end of himself, that's the point he will finally turn his heart to God in desperation
 - That's where Samson is now, sitting in a prison, blind and chained
 - He sees his situation for what it truly is and his heart turns back to God
- So the author, Samuel, indicates this change by noting that Samson's hair begins to grow back
 - Once again, Samuel isn't suggesting that the power of Samson is in the hair itself
 - Samuel is reflecting that as Samson humbled himself before God, the Lord honored His servant by restoring him at least to a degree
- Next week, we'll see the conclusion of the story and take a little time to reflect on Samson's time as judge