Pentecost 15 Judges 16:22-31
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Samson: A Case Study on the Cross
I. We start at the cross.
II. We daily need the cross.
III. We go back to the cross.

Dear Christian friends,

The **Book of Judges** takes us to what could be called the "DARK AGES" of Israel – the years after Joshua. We're told, ***"Another generation arose, who did not know the LORD or the deeds that He had done for Israel. The people of Israel committed evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals, and they abandoned the LORD, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. Everyone did as he saw fit. They angered the LORD."***

Judges records a REPEATING CYCLE in Israel's history. The Israelites would turn their backs on God. God would try to CALL them **back** to Him by making life miserable for them – **by letting** their hostile neighbors conquer them. The Israelites would then repent – God would raise up a deliverer – a ***"judge"*** – for them – and the Israelites would gain their freedom back. **After a few years** the WHOLE CYCLE would begin all over again. **Samson** is the LAST in a line of judges **mentioned** in this book.

But **what** does Samson have to do with TODAY'S FOCUS on the cross? Samson is a good illustration of Jesus' words, ***"If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?"*** So let's look at SAMSON – A CASE STUDY ON THE CROSS. **From Samson** we learn that 1)we start at the cross, 2)we daily need the cross and 3)we go back to the cross.

I. We start at the cross.

To really understand Samson's life we must go back to the START of his life. Samson was literally a MIRACLE child. Samson's parents were unable to have any children. But then ***"the angel of the LORD"*** appeared to Samson's mother with the announcement, ***"You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. Now, please be careful. Do not drink wine or beer, and do not eat anything unclean. No razor is to touch his head, for the boy will be a Nazirite dedicated to God from his mother's womb. He will begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines."***

From birth Samson' was a SPECIAL CHILD with a **special** MISSION. From birth Samson was to live his life following the **OT Nazirite vow**. AS A SIGN of his special devotion to God Samson was 1)not to drink any alcoholic beverages, 2)he was not to go near any **dead body** and 3)he was not to cut his **hair**. Those different rules were to BE A SIGN to **other people** and a DAILY REMINDER **to Samson** that he was DIFFERENT – he was set apart to God **in a special way**.

Samson's life was a reflection of what **the Israelites** were SUPPOSED to have been – God's chosen, **special** people. God had told them, ***"Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples to be His people, His treasured possession."*** Yet during this DARK AGE of the **judges** you couldn't see any difference between the Israelites and their heathen neighbors.

Peter tells us Christians, ***"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy."***

Understanding ourselves STARTS at **Jesus' cross**. Let's not kid ourselves. We're not God's people because we're SUCH GREAT people who have lived such great lives. We've been sinful **from the moment** of our conception. We all have very stubborn **sinful natures** that daily battle God and defiantly tell God, "You can't tell me what to do!" That WE ARE **God's people** is all God's doing and all because of Jesus AND HIS CROSS.

God set us apart as HIS OWN special people at our rebirth in Holy Baptism. **In Baptism** God gave us ALL THE BLESSINGS of Jesus **and His cross** – the forgiveness of **all** our sins – peace with God – eternal life in heaven. **In Baptism** God worked saving faith in our hearts – He washed all our sins away in Jesus' blood – He clothed us with Jesus' perfect life – He made us His dear children.

Set apart FOR GOD **from our rebirth** in Baptism we are now to live our **daily lives** SET APART for God. We can't separate our **Christian faith** from our everyday lives. We call this our CHRISTIAN VOCATION – our CALLING to live as **Christians** – **God's people**. We are no longer just a spouse – parent – child/brother/sister – student – farmer – worker – neighbor, etc. Now we are CHRISTIAN parents – **Christian** spouses – **Christian** students, workers, neighbors, etc. THAT WE ARE **Christians** – God's people – shapes how we live at home – at work – school – watching TV – on the **playground** or the **internet**, etc. Jesus' cross changes EVERYTHING that follows.

II. We daily need the cross.

We don't have time now to **go through all** of Samson's life. I urge you to read it in your devotions at home this week. You'll find the story of Samson in **Judges 13-16**.

It's not pretty reading. We **see Samson** defying and bossing around his dad. He has trouble controlling his **temper**. Rather than showing ***"self-control"*** and being IN CONTROL of himself Samson is controlled by his **own lusts** and **sinful nature**. He visits a **prostitute**. He takes Delilah as his MISTRESS. Samson flaunts his **Nazirite vow**. He foolishly exposes himself to **temptations** – going places he HAD NO BUSINESS going to.

With God's help and power Samson won some STUNNING VICTORIES over the **Philistines**. He began to think he was **practically** INVINCIBLE. After playing games with **Delilah** he finally reveals to her, ***"No razor has ever been used on my head, because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth."*** Delilah arranges to have Samson's hair ***"shaved off"*** while he's sleeping. Samson wakes up – but it's NOT JUST his strength that is gone. ***"He did not realize that the LORD had left him. The Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, brought him down to Gaza, and restrained him with bronze shackles. He had to grind grain in the prison."***

See Samson a CASE STUDY on our daily need for that cross Jesus talked about when He said, ***"If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?"***

Samson didn't want to ***"deny himself."*** It's more fun and EASIER to give in to your sinful nature than it is to ***"crucify"*** it. Samson didn't want to ***"follow"*** God – to live his life SET APART to God. It's more fun and **easier** to BE JUST LIKE everybody else. Samson abused God's **grace** and took advantage of God's **patience**. He THOUGHT everything was OK between God and him – he didn't realize that God ***"had left him."***

Learn from Samson TO HEED Jesus' call to ***"deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus."*** Learn from Samson the danger of FOOLISHLY EXPOSING yourself to temptation. Learn from Samson to never think or say, "I'd NEVER DO that!" Learn from Samson that pet sins are not HARMLESS – CUTE - **no big deal**. DAILY the sinful nature acts up – no matter **how many times** you beat it down. **Daily** the devil is after us. **Daily** the world beckons us. **Daily** – DAILY! – we need the cross to ***"crucify"*** our sinful natures. DAILY we need to go back to **Jesus' cross** for forgiveness and **new strength**.

III. We go back to the cross.

Samson is blind – a powerless prisoner – USED **like an animal** to grind grain. Going around and around in a circle he has time to think – and REPENT. ***"The hair on his head began to grow"*** and there also came an INNER CHANGE in Samson's heart.

The Philistine rulers hosted a ***"great sacrifice to Dagon their god to celebrate"*** their victory over Samson. ***"Our god has given our enemy Samson into our hands."*** About 3,000 people are partying in **Dagon's temple**. Samson is summoned to ***"provide amusement"*** and ***"serve as their entertainment."*** He looks SO PATHETIC and HELPLESS. He who was to have been the DELIVERER of **God's people** has become an OBJECT OF MOCKERY by **God's enemies**.

Samson has a servant place him **between** the two main pillars of the temple. Samson remembers the grace and **forgiving love** of his God. He prays, ***"LORD God, remember me."*** Samson remembers the mission **God had called** him to. He prays, ***". Give me strength this one more time, O God. Let me get revenge on the Philistines."*** Strengthened once again by God Samson pulled down the **temple pillars** and brought down God's judgment on those **Philistines praising** their idol Dagon.

See Samson as a CASE STUDY on the forgiveness that we find ONLY AT **Jesus'** cross. We may look at Samson and WONDER HOW he could be one of **God's own** – but looking honestly AT OURSELVES we should wonder how we can be **one of God's own**. But then there is the CROSS – JESUS' cross. **Our sins** may not be AS GLARING as some of Samson's but they are still sins offensive in God's sight. **Like Samson** we have forfeited any claim on God yet God remains gracious and **forgiving**. DAILY we sin – DAILY we go back to **Jesus'** cross and pray, ***"O LORD, remember me. Have mercy on me, a sinner."*** Standing at the cross we have God's answer to our cry – His own Son ***"the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world."*** At Jesus' cross is God's FORGIVENESS FULL and free **because** Jesus took our place on the cross and was punished for our sins. **At Jesus' cross** is perfect cleansing for that shed ***"blood of God's Son cleanses us from all sin."*** We go back to the cross – TO JESUS – for a renewed relationship with God – for eternal life in heaven when we die.

We go back to JESUS' CROSS and we find the strength to ***"deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus."*** Amen.

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