

Place: Lurgan Baptist 11: 3: 2003

Reading: Judges 15:1-20

## HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

### 12. GOD'S FREEDOM FIGHTER !

In the Spring of 1977 a television programme and a book suddenly triggered a social phenomenon. Everyone was talking about Alex Haleys, *Roots*, and a record smashing 80 millions people set aside other things to watch the final episode of the series. That was only the beginning. The publishers raced to keep an adequate supply of the book, magazine articles abounded, and people of all ethnic origins set out to discover their own "*roots*." One major magazine called "*Roots*," a potentially important bench mark in U.S. race relations. "*Roots*," begins with the story of an African named Kunta Kinte. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at the age of seventeen he was taken from his home in Mandinka in Africa, and shipped under the most degrading conditions, to a life of slavery in Virginia. But Kunta was a man with a passion for freedom. After months in chains, with his health broken, he was released for only a moment, and instantly he tried to escape.

Dogs hunted him down, and when he was recaptured, he was first beaten, then chained and hobbled for months on end. All around him, Kunta saw other coloured people broken and defeated by slavery, having

given in to the hopelessness of their condition. Kunta refused to give up his hope. Finally, the day came when his hobbles were taken off, and he ran away again. Since he could not go fast on an infected ankle, he was quickly recaptured, but he refused to give up. One day he stole a weapon and he fled again. It was snowing, once again he was quickly hunted down, because of his tracks in the snow. He was bound and whipped and returned to life in shackles. By now, the other slaves wanted nothing to do with him. They treated him as if he were some kind of wild animal, and Kunta simply could not understand them.

*How could they be at peace with the while man when they were his slaves ?* Death would be better than slavery, so he tried to escape one more time. He planned his escape very carefully and when an opportunity came, he hid in a wagon and rode off to freedom. But this time he was hunted down by a pair of ruthless slave-catchers, who cut off most of his foot with an axe. Kunta could no longer run, but he not lose his passion for freedom. His great desire was to live and die a free man. Now Samson was a man who had many flaws in his life, but he had one great virtue. He was a man with a passion for freedom in the middle of a society committed to compromise. With all his failure he was the only man of his day to recognise that there can be no compromise with the enemy. *The Jews around him were committed to appeasement but Samson was committed to be God's freedom fighter.* Not that long ago, there was a news story about 300 whales who were found marooned on a beach. Scientists could only explain the mystery by

speculating that the whales had been chasing sardines and became trapped in shallow water when the tide went out. For most of his life Samson was like a whale chasing sardines .... a great power pursuing small goals. He was finally beached by his pursuit of the sardine of sexual pleasure. But here in ( Ch 15 ) we have Samson at the spiritual pinnacle of his life, except for time of his death. Here we see the tremendous power of the man when he trusted God, and we realise how much he could have accomplished if only he had loved consistently for God. Now this section falls into three.

### **(1) PERSONAL REVENGE**

The passion to get even seemed to govern Samson's life.

His motto was “ *As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.* ” This episode began when Samson discovered that he had been the victim of terrible injustice and he was not the kind of man who was committed to turning the other cheek. Look at the steps that led to personal revenge. There was:

#### ***(a) THE ACTION THAT WAS UNRESTRAINED:***

Do you recall that ( Ch 14 ) is all about “ *going down.* ” ( 14:1,5,7,10 ) You see:

#### **1. Samson's WALK was Unrestrained:**

His compromise began with the “ *unequal yoke,* ” in marriage. His parents never saw another happy day after that day when their son went down to Timnath

and said,

“ *Get her for me to wife.* ” ( 14:3 ) You see, Samson went down to marry one woman, but now he finds he has thirty Philistines for his companions. ( 14:11 ) He is linked to one but that one has grown to thirty. Many years ago an old country preacher said this, “ *Sin will take you further than you want to go sin will cost you more than you want to pay and sin will keep you longer than you want to stay.* ” Have you ever heard believers say, “ *But I'm only going to compromise on one point, I'm only going to adopt one principle that is not Scriptural.* ” My .... so often that has become the thin edge of the wedge.

#### **2. Samson's TALK was Unrestrained:**

He is always telling his secrets. He is always anxious to talk about things that no-one ought to know but himself.

Think of the proposal he waged, think of him in the arms of Delilah divulging the secret of his strength. Hardly the talk of a man under the control and influence of the Spirit of God. (a)

#### ***(b) THE AFFAIR THAT WAS UNFULFILLED:***

Look at ( 15:1-2 ) Can you picture the scene ? it's a lovely day in May, there's a knock on the door. There stands Samson, with a young goat ( in lieu of flowers ) under his arm, a twinkle in his eye, you see he thinks its time to make up. He still wants the Philistine girl. What he didn't know was this ! It was a terrible disgrace for the marriage never to be consummated. So his bride had been given to the best man, and when

Samson arrives down to Timnath the shocking truth hits him. No, Samson could not consummate the marriage. Yes, they might be pagans but even Philistines have some standards, and so his father-in-law had married off his daughter to his best man. My .... if Samson was angry before he was furious now, and he was determined to attack the Philistines who had pressured the girl to turn her betrothal into a betrayal. A whole can of worms or shall we say foxes had been opened ! Now don't miss the steps that led to personal revenge ! (a) (b)

***(c) THE ANGER THAT WAS UNCONTROLLED:***

Now remember that there is a righteous anger and a sinful anger. Do you recall Paul's words ? "*Be ye angry and sin not.*" ( Eph 4:26 ) My .... if we would be angry and not sin we must be angry at nothing but sin. Now do you see what Samson does here ? Rather than focusing on the immediate problem of his stolen bride, he attacked the real enemy. It was not the girl or the father who had caused the problem, but the Philistines who had blackmailed the girl into betraying him. So Samson turned his fury upon them and hit them where it hurt .... in the stomach. Somehow Samson captured three hundred foxes. The Hebrew word can either mean foxes or jackals and since jackals run in pairs this may have been the animal. He tied those jackals in pairs put a torch between their tails and set them loose in the middle of the Philistines standing corn. Now remember the Philistines were an agricultural people. Their livelihood and food supply for an entire year depended on the grain harvest. No doubt they also experienced

some disillusionment since Dagon the god of grain and the god of Philistia was unable to prevent this catastrophe.

My .... if Samson wanted to stir up the Philistines he succeeded for when their harvest went up in flames everyone was livid and in anger they went up to Timnath and burned alive Samson's wife and father-in-law. Now while Samson's actions weakened the Philistines his motives appear to be personal, satisfying his own sensual desires, avenging his own injuries. (1) My .... personal vengeance and private gain rather than the glory of the Lord has motivated more than one "*crusader*," in the church. What some people think is godly zeal may actually be ungodly anger, fed by pride and motivated by selfishness. (1)

Are you guilty of that ? Now anger is a real problem. A great American statesman Thomas Jefferson worked out a way to handle his anger. He included it in his rules of living which describes how he believed adult men and women should live. He wrote this, "*When angry count ten, before you speak, if very angry count a hundred.*"

Author Mark Twain about 75 years later revised Jefferson's rules. He wrote, "*when angry count four, when very angry swear.*" There is a righteous anger but we're thinking about sinful anger. ( Ps 97:10 ) You see, when we turn to the N.T. we discover this sinful anger:

**1. DISPLEASES THE SPIRIT OF GOD:**

Look at ( Eph 4:30 ) Well, how do we grieve the Holy Spirit ? The answer is found in the context for here

Paul speaks of specific sins which grieve the Holy Spirit. Lying ( 4:25 ) Impurity ( 4:29 ) Anger ( 4:31 ) Do you realise that your bad temper grieves the Holy Spirit ? When you stamp your feet, march out of another's presence in a rage, when you sulk you grieve the Spirit of God. My .... do you realise when you nurse grudges, hold grievances against someone for weeks you're grieving the Holy Spirit ! 1.

### 2. DIVIDES THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

Do you recall what the Book of Hebrews says, “ *Follow peace with all men ....* ( Heb 12:14 ) As believers we have the responsibility “ *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” ( Eph 4:3 ) Now what disrupts that unity ? Bitterness, anger ! Bitterness has divided many a human family, do you recall Esau and Jacob ? Bitterness also divides the family of God. One believer has a grudge or attitude against another. My .... that bitterness not only affects the Christian holding the grudge and the Christian against whom the grudge is held but it disrupts the whole fellowship. For you see, the believer holding the grudge does not keep it to himself, resentment spreads thus many are defiled ! 1:2:

### 3. DESTROYS THE WORSHIP OF GOD:

Do you remember what the Saviour Himself said ? “ *If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer*

*thy gift.*” ( Matt 5:24 ) If I in the presence of God and while trying to worship God know in my heart that I am not right with a brother or sister in Christ then my worship is valueless and worthless. D.L. Moody tells of a town that he and Ira Sankey visited for a mission. It seemed as if they were beating the air, there was no power in the meetings. One day, Moody said that perhaps there was some Christian who was harbouring an unforgiving spirit. Immediately, the chairman of the committee who was running the mission, got up and left the meeting. The arrow had hit the mark and gone home. He had trouble with someone for six months. He hunted this man up and asked him to forgive him. That night the inquiry room was thronged. My .... is it not time that old anger was flushed out of your heart ? Is it not time that you started imitating your God ? Back to Samson ! (1)

### **(2) NATIONAL RELAPSE**

You see, the Philistines realised that the only solution to this problem was to discover, detect, and destroy Samson. So they approached Lehi in the vicinity of Zorah, to conquer this one man army once and for all. Now the Philistines had no quarrel with the rest of the Israelites and they when they came up to capture Samson they met with no resistance. We're not sure how many there were, what we do know is that Samson killed a 1,000 of them, and Judah raised a force of 3,000 to deal with Samson. So we would be safe to assume that there were at least 3,000 to 5,000 Philistines who came up to deal with one man. Now perhaps the most striking thing about this passage is

that it reveals to us the spiritual condition of God's people. ( 15:10-11 )

When the Philistines came up to destroy Samson, not only did the Israelites not protect him, but they also sent a force of 3,000 of their own men to bring him down to his death. Do you see what had happened ? The Israelites had so compromised their personal identity that they would rather hand Samson over than upset the Philistines. Now lets analyse this a little closer. Look at:

**(a) *THE MEN THAT ARE SPECIFIED:***

( 15:10 Perhaps a Judahite spokesman appeared on Philistine television to read a statement about how “ *outraged,*” Judeans were over the “ irresponsible and inexcusable behaviour,” of Samson the Danite. You see, the men of Judah considered Samson a troublemaker not their deliverer. Not Judah was no ordinary tribe. Do you recall what was said of Judah away back in the Book of Genesis ? ( Gen 49:8-10 ) Judah was a tribe of prominence. On the march through the wilderness Judah went first, and had the largest population in Moses' census. ( Num 1:27 10:14 26:22 ) But Judah did not live up to the dignity of which Jacob spoke. Indeed time and again in their history Judah failed the Lord. ( 2 Chron 24:17-18 Neh 4:10 ) My .... here is the cream of the nation, the people Samson thought he could depend on ready to deliver him up ! Is this not so true to Christian experience ? How many a pastor, evangelist, and servant of God has been betrayed by the

very people whom he thought he could trust ? (a)

**(b) *THE MARKS THAT ARE IDENTIFIED:***

For we can identify the marks of spiritual relapse here. All the consequences of spiritual compromise are found here as we look at Judah's attitude to the Philistines regarding Samson. Let me give three of them.

1. *Israel were LIVING with the Enemy:*

Look at ( 15:11 ) Sad, sad words. My .... is it possible that we have sunk to the level where we prefer slavery rather than freedom. Have we so accommodated ourselves to the world's lifestyle and to the presence of sins in our lives that we just accept them and give up the fight ? Now that's were Israel were, they had become satisfied with the status quo. They could not imagine why the Philistines would have any quarrel with them and they were filled with anger because Samson had rocked the boat. ( 15:11 ) Do you know that when you are living with the enemy you'll have no time for the committed ? Samson was an embarrassment to Judah and they would rather see him dead at the hands of the Philistines than change ! My .... it's a sad fact of Christian experience than if you are a believer committed to growing and maturing in Christ you will often be hindered the most by Christians who have become accustomed to an anaemic, wishy - washy Christian life. 1.

2. *Israel were IGNORED by the Enemy:*

The Philistines had no quarrel with them, why ? They represented no threat. Satan lost no sleep over Judah. You see, its only when we begin to serve God wholeheartedly and battle on the front line that Satan works to sidetrack you. Are you encountering opposition ? Well, thank God for it shows that you are making Satan sit up and take note. A man came to a preacher with the comment, “ *What is all this talk about Satan ? I have never met him in my life.*” Quick as a flash the answer came back, “ *Of course not. You will never meet someone when you are going the same way he is. But if you turn around and start going the other way, you will meet him soon enough.*” 1. 2.

### 3. Israel were WORKING for the Enemy:

Did you notice what Judah said in ( 15:12 ) ? Can you credit it ? The men of Judah were fighting the Philistines battles ! You see, there are no non-combatants in spiritual warfare. There is no Switzerland where we can sit out the battle in neutrality. If we are no actively involved in a positive way for Christ, we can become positive hindrances to the cause of Christ ! A:B:

### **(c) THE MAN THAT IS FORTIFIED:**

For in complete contrast to the compromise of Judah we see the courage of Samson. For on this day, how brightly his faith shone, he was a man trusting God. The writer to the Hebrews says, “ *Through faith Samson ...*”

( Heb 11:32 ) Do you see what his faith gave him ?

### 1. It gave him SERENITY in the Face of Betrayal:

He had every right to be furious with those traitors but while he could have retaliated against the Israelites he revealed that he had their interest at heart ! It was a great moment in Samson’s life when he dealt so kindly with people who were treating him so badly ! (1)

### (2) It gave him VICTORY in the Face of Defeat:

John says “ *And this is the victory that overcometh .... even our faith.*” ( 1 Jn 5:4 ) Who can question that it was only Samson’s faith in God that produced courage in a hour of crisis, and victory in the face of defeat ? “ *Faith mighty faith .... it shall be done.*” Snapping the ropes like thread he picked up a jawbone that was still fresh and strong with all its teeth in place, and in the hand of Samson it became a terrible weapon, and at the end of that battle, 1,000 Philistines lay dead. My .... do you see what Samson could do and be when he trusted God ? Do you see what you could do and be when you trust God ? Compromise spells defeat, but faith spells victory ! (1) (2)

### **(3) SPIRITUAL RENEWAL**

In the hour of his triumph Samson uttered a prayer to God, the only one recorded in Samson’s life prior to his death prayer. This was a spiritual high point in the life of Samson as he cried out to God after the victory. Look at:

**(a) THE PRAYER THAT WAS DIRECTED TO GOD:**

( 15:18 ) Look at the things he was conscious of. He was conscious that his victory was due to God. He was conscious that he was God's servant. He was conscious that he was called to deal with the enemy. Do you know something ?

1. Our CALLING affects our CONDUCT:

This was the one great occasion where Samson was conscious of living up to God's calling. When Queen Victoria was a little girl she was shielded from the fact that she was going to be Queen one day, even though she was being trained for the position. There was a fear that the knowledge would spoil her. As a result she did not take her training very seriously. Finally, her teachers decided that it was necessary to let her discover her future position. Her immediate response was " *then I will be good.*" Her conduct was controlled by her calling. Is yours ? 1.

2. Our VICTORY makes us VULNERABLE:

For he cried, " *Now shall I die for thirst .... uncircumcised.*" ( 15:18 ) It was an amazing cry from a man who had walked into the horde of Philistines, but now he's terrified of dying by thirst. But Samson's experience is not unique. Do you recall Elijah ? One moment on the mount of victory, the next in the valley of depression. My .... it's a short distance from the pinnacle to the pits, from the mountain peak of

excitement to the valley of despondency. Victory makes us vulnerable. Have you discovered that ? Do you know what we tend to forget ? That we are whole people, that there is a close connection between our physical and spiritual condition. You see, Samson did not need a Bible Conference, but he did need physical refreshment.

Dr. Lewis Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary says, " *We should not mistake worn nerves, physical weakness or depression for unspirituality, Many times sleep is needed more than prayer, and physical recreation than heart searching.*" Do you realise that your physical exhaustion may upset your walk with the Lord ? (a)

**(b) THE PROVISION THAT WAS EFFECTED BY GOD:**

Look at ( 15:19 ) What a practical God we have. I am so glad that I have a God who is concerned about my physical needs as well as my spiritual needs. Samson needed refreshment, God gave it. Elijah needed refreshment God gave it. God provides for us physically.

But God provides for us spiritually. ( 15:20 ) Between ( Ch 15-16 ) there is a gap of 20 years and during that time Samson led his people in a limited way.

You see, with all his shortcomings, lets never forget that Samson stood almost alone for his God in Israel. In a nation that was committed to the status quo, Samson was committed to freedom under God. Because he

dared to trust God, God was able to use him. *What about*

*you* ? Do you have that passion for God's victory in and through your life ? Like Samson are you prepared to challenge the status quo and trust in God ?