

Place: Lurgan Baptist 18:2:2003

Reading: Judges 16:1-21

HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

13. TOYING WITH TEMPTATION

In Greek mythology Achilles was the son of Peleus King of the Myrmidons and Thetis a sea goddess. Achilles was the greatest, bravest, and most handsome warrior in the army. One of the tales about his childhood relates how Thetis held the young Achilles by the heel and dipped him in the waters of the River Styx. Through the waters mythological power *Achilles became invulnerable* that is every part except the heel by which he was held. That small part of his body untouched by water remained vulnerable. From this story we get the term “*Achilles heel*,” which describes our weakest point of vulnerability. It was just at this point that an arrow struck the near invincible Achilles and killed him. We have all our own “*Achilles heels*,” points of extreme vulnerability in our walk with God.

For some it is money, for others it is ambition, for some others it is power, for others its prestige. For Samson it was sensuality. For just as Superman was vulnerable to kryptonite so Samson had a chink in his armour through which his greatness was sapped. You see, when it came to women, Samson melted before his passions. He was the “*He Man with a She Weakness*.” Now the story of Samson’s downfall at the hands of Delilah, is

one of the most famous stories of the Bible. Its blend of love, sex, violence and treachery gives it all the dimensions of classical tragedy, therefore it has been told and retold down through the ages. But Samson’s tragedy is not unique. His experience was more dramatic than most but there are countless believers who have lost their strength for exactly the same reason as Samson. If I am honest I must confess and you must be confess that we have tendency to toy with temptation rather than to resist it, to trifle with sin rather than to flee from it. Its so easy to play with the Delilah of sin, for all of us know the pull of her persuasive powers.

My temptation is a constant part of the Christian life. Because we face a three fold enemy, the world, the flesh and the devil temptation comes in a variety of ways. Nevertheless we can learn some basic lessons for 21st century living from the ancient story of Samson’s downfall. Now let me divide this passage up from you. In (16:1-3) we have **INCLINATION:** in (16:4-20) we have **TEMPTATION:** and then in (16:21) we have **DEGRADATION !**

(1) THE INCLINATION SAMSON FOSTERED

Oscar Wilde once wrote, “*I can resist anything except temptation.*” That seems to be an accurate analysis of Samson’s attitude here, in (Ch 16) If ever there was an illustration of the truth of (1 Cor 10:13) it is found here. Do you recall Paul’s words ? “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be*

tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it.” Samson did not fail because the temptation was too strong, and he did not fail because the temptation was inescapable. He failed because he toyed and trifled with sin, until finally, he gave in. Ambrose an early Christian writer, put it like this,

“ Samson, when brave, strangled a lion, but he could not strangle his own love. He burst the fetters of his foes, but not the cords of his own lusts. He burned the crops of others, and lost the fruit of his own virtue when burning with the flame enkindled by a single woman.”

The first part of Samson’s downfall is not very well known, but this episode in Gaza was preparatory for all that followed. Indeed what he sowed in Gaza, he reaped in Sorek with Delilah. Now we are not sure when this sad event occurred, but it probably took place at the end of his 20 year stint as a judge. For a period Samson ruled by faith (Heb 11:32) but like many others he did not finish his ministry on a high note. Notice that:

(a) HE DULLED HIMSELF SPIRITUALLY:

There can be no doubt that Samson at this point in his life was totally out of fellowship with God. Apparently he had learned absolutely nothing from his previous mistakes as recorded in (Ch’s 14 & 15) His devotional life as far as we can tell was non-existent ! Samson dulled his spiritual senses. What about your devotional life ? How much time do you spend in the Word ?

Whom do you pray for ? What’s your worship time like ? Do you really desire to bring Christ to others ? You see, when your devotion to the Lord wanes, when you lose your early fervour, when your hunger for the Word begins to evaporate, when your time in prayer grows shorter, when you like to be with the world more than the people of God, view those signs as red lights flashing on the dashboard of your life warning you that your spiritual senses are growing dull ! Was this not one of the reasons why Samson fell ? (a)

(b) HE DEFILED HIMSELF MORALLY:

Look at (16:1) It seems incredible to us that a servant of God (15:18) who did great works in the power of the Spirit, would visit a prostitute, but the record is here for all to read. In recent years there have been many ministerial scandals in the church to put all of us on our guard. Do you recall Paul’s words ? “ *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*”

(1 Cor 10:12) Here is Samson, taking that wonderfully strong body especially given to him by God and uniting it with the abused body of a prostitute. Now Samson defiled himself by:

1. WHERE HE WENT:

Gaza was an important seaport town located about forty miles from Samson’s hometown of Zorah. It was one of the five principal cities of the Philistines. Why he went there we are not told but can you see him mingling with the crowds in the busy streets ? “ *There*

is Samson our hated enemy.” He was not about to win any popularity contests in Gaza. 1.

2. WHAT HE DID:

Samson always wayward in his relations with the opposite sex defiles himself morally. (14:7 14:16 16:1, 16:15) That Nazirite who was to be consecrated to God, becomes involved in sin. Do you know something ? *Sensuality may be dormant but its never dead !* Like embers smouldering beneath the surface of a thought to be extinguished camp fire lust when fanned in the open air can fuel a forest fire and invariably someone always gets burned. Do you recall the words of the wise man in the Book of Proverbs ? (6:26-29) Apparently for 20 years Samson ruled righteously and by faith. (15:20 Heb 11:32) But that sensuality though dormant was never dead. Do you recall that children’s chorus ? “ *Oh, be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little feet where you go, be careful little hands what you touch.*” My are we vigilant in these matters ? Do we keep away from places, from programmes, from people, from anything that would stimulate sensuality ? (a) (b)

(c) HE DISPLAYED HIMSELF PHYSICALLY:

For when his enemies discovered that Samson was in the city the Gaza Civil Defence Unit laid plans to trap him, they posted an ambush but they did not reckon on the enormous strength of Samson. For in the middle of the night, Samson left the prostitute’s house, put his arms around the gateposts of the city, which would be

driven deep into the earth, tore out the gates, posts and all and carried them on his shoulders “ *to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.*” (16:3) What an incredible feat of strength for that was a journey of some thirty eight miles ! My if Samson were to appear in the 21st century he would require a special category in the Olympics ! But that only makes his tragedy greater. Here was a man who had power without purity, strength without self-control, and because he did not know holiness he would experience a crushing defeat.

But you say, “ *Why didn’t God chasten him ? Remove him ? Punish him ? Discipline him ?* “ Because God is patient and longsuffering with us and God uses us in spite of our shortcomings ! You see, blessing is never necessarily the mark of strength and purity, God does not bless us because of us but in spite of us. Samson however, had taken a tragic step downward and soon he would reap what he had sown. (1)

(2) THE TEMPTATION SAMSON FACED

Temptation is when you are asked to do it, sin is when you do it. Let me give you a series of quotes that may be helpful. Erwin Lutzer says, “ *Every temptation comes to us via our thoughts.*” J.O.Sanders, “ *The mind of man is the battleground on which every moral and spiritual battle is fought.*” Vance Havner, “ *Our defeat or victory begins with what we think, and if we guard our thoughts we shall not have much trouble anywhere else along the line.*” Now this temptation revolves around Delilah. Actually, we know very little about her except that she was sexually attractive to

Samson, and he entered into an affair with her. Her name was Semitic, not Philistine, but from the story, she seems to have been a Philistine who had Hebrew blood in her family.

By now, the Philistines were determined to get rid of Samson once for all. The Philistines had five major cities, each ruled over by a tyrant (1 Sam 6:4) and those lords came to Delilah with a proposal. They offered her about \$5000 to discover the secret of Samson's strength. That was a great deal of money and Delilah immediately agreed to sell the man who loved her. Now its interesting to notice where this temptation took place. Geographically the Valley of Sorek lay between Zorah and Timnath on the border of Judah and Philistia. The city of Beth-shemesh was located there. Here Samson found a woman and he fell in love with her. My it's a dangerous thing to linger at the enemy's border for you might get caught. Alfred Edersheim tells us that this was "*the place of the choice red grape.*" Certain foods and drinks suggest to us worlds of description. For example, rice suggests to us poverty, champagne suggests to us prosperity, and the choice red grape suggests to use sensuality. Here in the place of the choice red grape Samson faced his greatest temptation ! Lets note several things about this temptation.

(a) THE SOURCE OF IT:

Delilah ! (16:6) Now there are three very important principles about temptation that are embodied in Delilah.

1. It was ATTRACTIVE:

The Philistines did not hire Tugboat Annie, they hired a beauty Queen. Delilah was a beautiful, attractive woman, and Samson wanted her very much. You see, when temptation comes it comes in attractive packages. Have you discovered that ? Have you discovered that when temptation comes it does not come as something ugly but as something desirable, good and fulfilling. It was only later that Delilah was revealed for what she really was. You see, Satan does not come right out and say, "*I want to destroy your effectiveness as a Christian. I want to rob you of your power and joy. Are you interested ?*" Of course you would not be ! So Satan puts his poison in the middle of a sirloin steak and invites you out for dinner ! Attractive !

2. It was SEDUCTIVE:

The word Delilah means "*flirtatious or seductive.*" This seductive woman was to entice Samson. The Hebrew word here means "*to find an opening,*" a point of vulnerability an Achilles heel. The same word is used earlier when Samson's wife is threatened by the Philistines. "*Entice thy husband,*" (14:15) Now this word is also used in the Book of James ! (1:14) Here the Greek word means "*luring with a bait.*" it's the picture of a fish nestled quietly underneath a sheltered place and a cunning old fisherman (Walton) just drops the bait and whether the bait is artificial or real does not matter. The bait is designed to appeal to the nature of the fish, to entice. For Samson the enticement was

the lure of the opposite sex. Like an inspecting fish Samson is drawn in by Delilah slowly but surely, the bait is taken and the fish is caught.

The Book of Proverbs gives us a vivid picture of how Samson ended up being caught. (Prov 7:6-23) Delilah whose name means “ *seductive*,” comes to different people in different forms. To Noah she came in the form of *wine*. (Gen 9:21) To Uzziah she came in the form of *power*. (2 Chron 26:15) To David she came in the form of *a beautiful figure* (2 Sam 11:1) To Diotrefes she came in the form of *position*. (3 Jn 9) Our adversary knows the appropriate guise in which to send his Delilah to us and if we trifle with it, instead of fleeing from it the result will be disaster. My we have all

Achilles heels weak points ! Its important to know our strengths but it’s a life and death issue to know our weaknesses ! It was the unprotected heel of Achilles that proved fatal. It was Samson’s vulnerability to sexual excitement that led to his downfall. What about you ?

What is your Achilles heel ? Is it impurity ? Greed ? Selfish ambition ? The lust for power ? The love of money ? 1. 2.

3. It was COOPERATIVE:

That is it had to with people ! Do you know something ?

Samson did not cut off his own hair. He elected to spend his time in the wrong company and they did the rest. When does temptation come ? When we choose

the wrong company. Samson always chose the wrong company.

First, there was the Philistine woman from Timnath (14:1) then there was the prostitute from Gaza (16:1) and now Delilah. It was those women with whom Samson chose to spend his time, who helped destroy his character. My there is nothing that shapes our character more than the people with whom we **choose** to spend our time. Paul says “ *Be not deceived evil communications corrupt good manners.* ” (1 Cor 15:33) The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “ *Evil companionships corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character.* ” My God is not calling us into isolationism that retreats into a holy huddle. But we need to look carefully at our friendships to discover if they are drawing us away from our Saviour. Do you ever evaluate your friendships ? Are they drawing you away from Christ, or are they drawing you to Christ ? Are they dragging you down spiritually ? Or are they pulling you up spiritually ? Are there any Delilah’s in your life that you need to deal with ? (a)

(b) THE COURSE OF IT:

How did it proceed ? Well, Delilah, went to work with all her seductive charm. She asked Samson to tell her the secret of his strength. (16:6) Samson should have immediately sensed the danger, refused to answer, and gone home. But he did not. Rather he decided to play with her and they played a game called, “ *The Philistines are here.* ” On three occasions Samson deceived her. Seven fresh bowstrings, new ropes,

weaving his hair all were tried but none were successful.

(16:7,11,13) Now you think, that by now Samson would begin to get a little bit suspicious. It would seem to me that if every time I woke up, I was tied in cords, wrapped with ropes or woven into a loom I might guess that something fishy was going on, but Samson persisted in playing with fire until he got burned. (a)
(b)

(c) *THE FORCE OF IT:*

Look at (6:16) She was persistent wasn't she ? My Satan does not give up easily, if he took three shots at the Lord Jesus you can be sure he is not going to give up easily on you ! So Delilah pulled out all the stops, until finally she rusted away his resistance like her Philistine predecessor before her. (14:7) Have you been to a slaughterhouse and seen cattle lining up to be killed ? Well, that's a vivid picture of Samson here. Delilah simply rattled the bucket and Samson followed to his death. Samson said " razor," and Delilah saw silver. You see:

1. When we give in Gradually, we will give way Eventually:

Did you notice that each of Samson's replies was getting nearer and nearer his secret all the time ? He went from the bowstrings to the ropes, from the ropes to his head, and from his head to his hair ! 1.

2. When we Toy with Temptation it Traps us:

The N.T. does not tell us to fight this kind of temptation, it tells us to flee from it. " *Flee fornication,*" (1 Cor 6:18) Do you recall Paul's words to young Timothy ? " *Flee also youthful lusts.*" (2 Tim 2:22) Now lets be honest. Fleeing is not easy. It would have been difficult for Samson for he had a real affection for Delilah. Samson chose not to flee and he lost his character, but Joseph chose not to stay and he maintained his testimony. Do you remember Joseph ? (Gen 39:7-12) Joseph and that's the recommended procedure every time you are faced with lust. Flee, abandon ship ! Ralph Emerson says, " *Call on God but row away from the rocks.*" Is that what you need to do ?

Are there things in our lives that we need to deal with in a drastic way ? Are there areas in our lives that need to be changed if we are going to preserve our character ?

Perhaps its our lifestyle, maybe its our leisure activities, it could be our job, could be it our company ? My fleeing is hard but it is essential. For you cannot trifle with sin in your life. Samson thought playing with Delilah was a game. It turned out to be Russian roulette and he bought the bullet. Its pathetic to read (16:18-21)

How could Samson ever go to sleep in the lap of a woman like Delilah ? He must have known what she was going to do. But sleep he did and suddenly in the midst of his sleep he heard the same old shout, " *the*

Philistines are here.” This time he jumped up, but he was bald. Sure, he had broken the other parts of the Nazarite vow before now, but he had kept his hair unshaven, as a sign of his commitment to God. There was no magic in his hair. It was only a symbol of his separation unto God, but if his hair was shaven Samson’s feeble dedication would crumble completely. I think the last part of (16:20) is one of the saddest statements in the Bible. “ *And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.*” For God is not patient forever with sinful living ! Can you see (1) (2) ?

(3) THE DEGRADATION SAMSON FELT

Do you see in (16:21) the blinding, binding, grinding results of sin. Although called by God to judge Israel (13:5) and endued with mighty power to accomplish that work (13:25, 14:6, 14:19 15:14 16:28) Samson ended up his life in captivity to his enemies the Philistines and that captivity cost him three things !

(a) SAMSON LOST HIS STRENGTH:

Look at (16:21) “ *But the Philistines took him,*” they had never done that before. You see, no longer was he the mighty Samson he was just like any other man. (16:27) This mighty man who had walked off with the gates of Gaza in an amazing display of physical strength is now bound, reduced to doing the work of a slave woman shackled in chains. (a) Do you remember when you were strong for God ? When the glow was in your heart and you were a overcomer ? My have you lost your spiritual strength because of self-

indulgence ? (a)

(b) SAMSON LOST HIS SIGHT:

(16:21) Can you see that iron heated white hot in the fire ? Can you see those Philistines laying Samson on the ground ? Can you hear the scream of God’s servant as the tip of that iron touches each of his eyes ? His vision is gone. (b) Indeed he was as blind as any beggar in Gaza. Does this explain why some of us as believers have lost our spiritual sight ? The Word of God no longer flashes with new meaning to us. We are blind to a lost world that needs evangelism on the attack. We no longer see the souls that are going down to hell ! *Has the Devil put your eyes out ?* Sure if God’s people saw the need of sinners today, would they not be urgent to bring them to the gospel service that they might hear the life-giving Word ! My we are quite happy to come and go and never say to a loved one, “ *You are a perishing soul, but come with me and we will do thee good.*” Has this church lost its vision ? Wonderful, to have missionary conventions, but has it motivated you to be any more burdened for souls on your doorstep ? (a) (b)

(c) SAMSON LOST HIS SERVICE:

For no longer could he serve God as a true Nazarite instead he ground corn in a prison house. That’s an interesting word, “ *grind.*” (16:21) Is this what God’s service is to you ? Are you just grinding ? Is it all a dreadful bore for you ? Do you need to make an effort to get out once on Sunday ? Do you ever come to the

prayer meeting ? No ! No motivation, no joy, no service ! Is that you ? No longer do you teach the children, gave out tracts, witness in the open air. Have you time for business, pleasure, but no time to work for God !

My God does not want us to miss the picture of (16:21) Samson lost his strength, his sight, his service. Self-indulgence devastated his life. Will you heed the warning this ? With all of our potential, strength and accomplishments, we can up like Samson, if we do not learn that we cannot toy with temptation. Don't toy with temptation, don't trifle with sin, don't play with fire.

***“ Fight manfully onward dark passions subdue
Look ever to Jesus He will carry you through.”***