

## MAKE ROOM FOR JEPTHAH

Jephthah was a man of outstanding qualities, but his character was overshadowed by his parentage. He was a bastard child, a son of a harlot – and his half-brothers would never let him forget it. But understand, with God there are no illegitimate, or accidental children. God is the giver of life – and every human being is valuable to God.

It's tragic any man would be judged by the circumstances of his birth or the mistakes of his parents – issues he has no control over. Dr. King's famous line, "Judge a man not by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character," should be expanded to include the legitimacy of a person's birth.

Today, you hear businesses bragging about being equal opportunity employers – but God is the only person void of all prejudice – He's the one true equal opportunity employer! God recruits a man everyone else rejects... Jephthah.

Judges 10:3 tells us, "Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him." Jephthah failed to find acceptance among the people of God so he went out and found it among worthless men.

Could it be that the bars and bathhouses of Metro Atlanta are filled tonight

with people who, like Jephthah, have sought to find acceptance and love among the people of God, but were rejected? Their need for friendship and support has driven them to hang out with worthless people.

Guys, the Church is not a hotel for saints, but a hospital for sinners. While on earth Jesus was known as a *friend of sinners*. The despised and rejected flocked to Jesus – He embodied God's love. So should we!

Philip Yancey's book, "*What's So Amazing About Grace?*", opens with the story of a Chicago prostitute. This woman was homeless, sick, near starvation – she'd do anything for a buck. Philip's friend asked her if she'd ever thought of turning to a church for help. She responded, "Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

Yancey draws the conclusion, "Evidently the down-and-out, who flocked to Jesus when he lived on earth, no longer feel welcome among His followers."

Is that true? Is there room in our church for the illegitimates of society? Do we draw people in or turn 'em away? How much do we really want to be like Jesus?

### Devotion Box - Do we have our "shibboleths" ?

Jephthah defeated Ephraim, and set up a crossing guard on the banks of the Jordan to keep the men of Ephraim from infiltrating Gilead.

When a person approached they were asked to say the word "Shibboleth", or "flowing stream". But the dialect spoken in Ephraim made it difficult to pronounce the "sh" sound, so if the password came out "sibboleth" instead of "shibboleth" – without the "sh" - the guard knew the traveler was the enemy, and killed him.

Originally this was a clever tactic, but it's sad that it was needed. Israel was a family – 12 tribes, but one nation. Likewise the Church is a family, and it's tragic when brothers and sisters in Christ squabble and refuse to dwell in unity.

The word "shibboleth" is also in our English dictionary. It's defined as: "a test for determining if you belong". It's sad that "shibboleths" exist in the church...

"She doesn't dress the way we do – he doesn't share the hobbies we have - she doesn't listen to our type of

music – they don't live in the right neighborhood – that family is not the right color". Guys, it grieves God's heart when cliques form in the church, and use their own "shibboleths" to decide who's in and who's out.

The human body is a blend of unity and diversity, and so is the body of Christ.

Let's not resent our differences, nor even tolerate them – let's celebrate them. Our diversity adds to our strength. Rather than develop little "shibboleths" to keep people out, let's look for ways to include new people. And by all means, let's stay focused on the commonality that transcends our differences, our Lord Jesus!

Bible Scan Judges 11-21

## Devotion Box - Wandering Eyes

When the Philistines took Samson prisoner they poked out his eyes. Often the deed was done with a hot iron.

Isn't it interesting that this particular form of torture was selected. Remember, Samson's problem his whole life was a lust that was no doubt fueled by his *wandering eyes*.

It's amazing what has to be taken from a man before he'll give God his whole heart. Samson has to lose his outer eyes, in order to open up his inner eyes.

Whatever it is that's keeping you from following God, it's time to deal with it. Stop being nonchalant with the sin in your life, and take the steps repentance requires.

Verse 22 makes a passing comment, "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven."

In other words, a fresh commitment was still possible. Samson had been shelved, but the shelf doesn't have to be permanent. And the same is true for you.

## TWO JAWBONES

In Judges 15:8 Samson again fights the Philistines. We're told, "he attacked them hip and thigh..." In other words, he stomped them. It was a thorough trouncing.

This time the Philistines call for back-up. They bring in the army to arrest him – 1000 men to pick up one man. They soon learn that's not enough.

The Philistines camp against the city of Lehi, and order the men of Judah to turn over Samson. Samson allows his countrymen to bind his hands, and turn him over to the Philistines - but when he meets the enemy, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him. Samson picks up the jawbone of a donkey, and kills 1000 Philistines.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, says this was the conquest that went to Samson's head. His song of victory in verse 16 was just a portion of a bigger boast. Josephus tells us, "(Samson) said that this did not come to pass by the assistance of God, but that his success was ascribed to his own courage..." Proving that there are actually two jawbones of a donkey at work in this story.

This is why God allows Samson to be overtaken with thirst in verse 18. It humbled Samson, and it reminded him that without God's help he was totally powerless. *God can use the jawbone of a donkey, or He can shut one up!*

# The Trials & Triumphs of Samson

## SAMSON'S SECRET

If Samson was a Bill Goldberg look-alike – a hefty, beefy, muscle bound hunk – why is everyone wanting to know the secret of his strength? I'd think it would be obvious. Keep him out of the weight room!

This is why I believe Samson had an average physique – maybe even a slight build. There wasn't a ripple in Samson's shirt, but when the Spirit of God came upon him he exuded super-human strength. His strength was in his vow.

## THE HE-MAN WITH A SHE-PROBLEM

Samson is one of the most interesting characters in all the Bible. Unlike other judges, no one rallied to fight alongside Samson. He was a one-man wrecking crew – a Hebrew vigilante – the Rambo of ancient Israel. Samson single-handedly waged a guerilla war against Israel's arch-enemy, the Philistines. Samson was a man of incredible privilege, and incredible potential, yet he lived much of his life a moral failure. His lust for the ladies eroded his commitment to God, and it eventually caused God to put Samson on the shelf.

You can sum up his life by saying, "*Samson was a he-man, with a she-problem.*"

The dilemma with Samson was the contradiction between his personal life and public ministry. Here's a man who walks out of a hooker's house, and is used by God to do the miraculous - and win a victory. How can this be? I believe it's proof of God's mercy and grace. God is willing to use imperfect vessels – if He wasn't, He wouldn't use any of us. God was patient with Samson's moral lapses for 20 years, but there came a point when enough was enough. God used Samson despite his weaknesses, until those weaknesses turned into a defiant act.

Understand, each time a person yields to temptation the condition of his heart grows worse. He becomes more callous. Notice Samson's deterioration... the first time he lusts for a woman at least he tries to do the honorable thing, and marry her. The second time, he settles for a one-night-stand - but it's done in secret - it's not permanent. He still senses shame. But the third time, he throws away restraint, and shacks up with Delilah in a brazen rebellion.

I detect a progression – a seedy slide. Samson has a lust problem he never turns from... he tries to legitimize it through marriage - then privatize it with a hooker - finally he secularizes his outlook, and lives in an openly immoral relationship. Samson *gives up* the fight for virtue, and *gives in* to sin. He becomes shameless... it's a slippery slope down to the edge of the cliff.

## SAMSON'S FINALE

Samson's long hair was the part of his vow he had kept. It was the last tie between him and God - the last token he could give to prove that he cared about pleasing God. As long as there was a desire for godliness God could forgive his weakness, but now the desire is depleted.

Delilah lulls Samson asleep on her knees. A man cuts off his hair, and his strength is gone.

In one sense we can say a single woman did what a thousand Philistines couldn't – bring down Samson. But it wasn't just Delilah. It was a lifestyle that built up over years – a tolerance – an accommodation with a sin that Samson should've never allowed. It was a cavalier attitude toward a serious problem. Samson was a man who played with a poisonous snake, and it finally reached up and bit him.

Samson's life teaches us that sin doesn't just produce momentary failure – it saps the life out of your commitment to God.

The Philistines immediately begin to torture the man who tortured them for 20 years. They poke out his eyes, and parade him in the temple of Dagon, their god. They give credit to Dagon for delivering their enemy into their hands. How it must've broke Samson's heart to know he'd become a trophy to a false god.

One day Samson is in their temple – the object of the Philistine's jeers and insults. He's drawn quite a crowd. On the roof alone are 3000 gawkers. The former strongman of Israel is tied between the two supporting posts.

Samson prays his final prayer in verse 28, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" Then Samson pushed, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him – and the pagan temple turned to rubble. In Samson's grand finale he brought the house down! We're told in verse 30, "So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life."

It took the loss of his vision for Samson to see what life is really all about – all that matters is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit - to count for Christ, and bring glory to God. Samson prayed for one more opportunity... even if it cost him his life.

How desperate are you to know God's power? Do you want to count for God more than life itself? In contrast to Samson's grand finale, God wants us to be *living sacrifices*. Even if you've been on the shelf, ask God to use you again. It's still possible!

## THE OUTBACK PHILOSOPHY

Judges 17-21 reveals just how far a society deteriorates when "everyone does what is right in his own eyes." These chapters supply vivid evidence that when God's rules get thrown out the game gets brutal and ugly and cutthroat.

I call it the "*Outback philosophy*". Outback Steakhouse has a commercial where a truck-full of good-looking guys and gals drive past the warning signs on the beach. They violate the posted laws, and have a fun and frolicking party – complete with bloomin' onions, choice steaks, and brewskies for everybody. All the while the spokesman chants the motto, "*No Rules, Just Right*".

Once I asked an Outback waiter to let me substitute cheese fries for regular fries, and he said it was against the rules. I said, "*Wait a minute! Your motto is NO RULES, JUST RIGHT.*" The motto only applies when it works in Outback's favor.

That's also what happens in an amoral society. People make rules all right – all societies have rules – but when you toss out God's rules it becomes a contest to see who can get the power so they can make rules that best serve their own interests. It gets nasty, bloodthirsty.

## RELIGION A LA CARTE

Chapters 17-18 and the story of "*mixed-up Micah*" demonstrate how goofy things had gotten. No morality, no commitment to God's truth. What's going on here? Here's a man that seems "*spiritual*", but his spirituality has very little to do with the Bible – it's a hodge-podge of paganism and Judaism and the occult.

Welcome to today's brand of spirituality! Every survey and poll tells us that interest in spirituality is up, while commitment to biblical truth is down.

David Kinnaman of Barna Research says in USA Today, "People are beginning to develop a hybrid personal faith that integrates different perspectives from different religions that may even be contradictory... That doesn't bother them."

Women's Day magazine reports on people worshipping in small groups at home – home altars, and rooms dedicated as shrines are becoming popular. It sounds just like *mixed-up Mike*. Today's spirituality is a smorgasbord of new age, occult, eastern, and traditional beliefs. It's a heretical blend. It has nothing to do with biblical Christianity. Today's slogan is, "I'm into spirituality, not religion."

Perhaps Richard Cimino and Don Lattin say it best in their book, "*American Demographics*": "Behind this shift is a search for a... religion of the heart, not of the head... it's practical and personal, more about stress reduction than salvation, more therapeutic than theological. It's about feeling good, not being good. It's as much about the body as the soul." It's a convenient spirituality without morality or authority. "*Jesus is Lord*" would never fit into the modern notions of spirituality.

*Mixed-up Mike*, and the quagmire of religious sentiment that poses today as spirituality is summed up in Judges 17:6: "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Real spirituality can't be personalized to your own private tastes. "*Religion a la carte*" may be popular with men, but it will never gain the approval of God. True worship of God... worships God only in the way God wants to be worshipped.

# Bible Scan - Judges 11-21

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study, email Pastor Sandy: [sandyadams@calvarychapel.org](mailto:sandyadams@calvarychapel.org)

Calvary Chapel Announcements - January 16, 2000

## 1/19 through 1/21 PASTORS & CHURCH LEADERS CONFERENCE:

**Guest Speakers:** Chuck Smith-CC Costa Mesa, Gayle Erwin-Servant Quarters, Brian Bell-CC Murrieta, Ricky Ryan-CC Santa Barbara, Don McClure-CC San Jose, Sandy Adams-CC Stone Mountain

**1/28 through 1/30 Adult Ski Trip**-High Pastures, N.C. \$130 per person. Price includes transportation, lodging, ski rental, lift ticket, and some meals. Register at the Information Counter. The deadline is tonight.

Next Bible Scan- January 30- Ruth 1-4

**"However, the hair of his head began to grow again..."**

- Judges 16:22

**Bible Scan Memory Verse**

## Devotion Box - Are you caught in the Sin Cycle ?

It's been said, "The one truth we learn from history is that we do not learn from history." Mistakes get repeated. Failures get passed down. And that's what happened during the days of the Judges. The nation Israel found themselves trapped in a re-occurring cycle.

Five words explain 350 years of history... *SIN* – Israel forsakes God, and worships idols. *SERVITUDE* – because of their sin God allows their enemies to oppress them. *SUPPLICATION* – Israel puts away their idols, and cries to God for deliverance. *SALVATION* – God raises up a judge who leads God's people to victory. *SERENITY* – victory is followed by peace.

The question though is how many times has this cycle been repeated in your life? What was cyclical for Israel is a pattern for many people today. Guys, if we learn to see ourselves in Christ, and depend on Jesus for our every need, we'll experience consistent victory – not the ups and downs that plagued Israel. If you're in the Sin Cycle, it's time to get out!

**WHEN GOD GOES,  
ANYTHING GOES**

## POWER & PURITY

After Jephthah sends an unheeded warning to the king of Ammon, we're told in verse 29, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah...", but the anointing of the Spirit doesn't make you immune from mistakes. Jephthah makes a rash vow.

Remember Gideon was filled with the Spirit, yet still doubted God's promise. Later in Judges the Spirit of God comes upon Samson to defeat the Philistine army, but his super-human strength doesn't insure a victory over his own libido... And the filling of the Spirit doesn't stop Jephthah from making a rash, foolish vow.

Guds, we need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It provides power, but it's not an instant ticket to holiness. Godly living, and moral purity is a work of the Spirit, but it also involves my submission to God's will, and the renewing of my mind with God's Word, and the preservation of a humble, repentant attitude.

In Scripture we learn that ungodliness always produces unrighteousness. When a person believes wrong, they eventually behave wrong. Another way to put it: "*When God goes, anything goes.*"

This is why it's so important to study God's Word, and build a solid foundation. There is a right and wrong - a truth and error - and we need to be able to discern the difference.