

Giant Ungainted

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the tragic life of Samson, emphasizing the dangers of unchecked lust and the hope of redemption through God's grace.

Duration: 51:21

Scripture: Judges 16:21-22, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Giants"

Description

In this sermon, the focus is on the life of Samson, a judge in ancient Israel. The passage being discussed is about Samson being captured by the Philistines, who gouged out his eyes and imprisoned him. Despite his physical strength, Samson's life was dominated by lust, which led to chaos and disappointment. His soul became increasingly shriveled and impoverished, causing him to bring darkness and dishonor wherever he went. The sermon emphasizes the danger of unchecked lust and the importance of maintaining control over our desires.

Transcript

I would ask you kindly to turn with me to the passage from which Mr. Lowe has just read, and I would like to read again those closing words, which will be the focus of our meditation this evening. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison.

But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved, giant, un-gianted. Samson's public life as a judge in ancient Israel stretched over a period of twenty years or so, though the biblical record covers only a few chosen excerpts, a few chosen incidents from the entire history, and the perusal of the material may well stagger us. Not one incident really serves to show Samson as a man of God, or a man of spiritual stature.

There are indications here of what might have developed into spiritual maturity, but they never did. The record of this life is probably one of the saddest, one of the most tragic in the entire annals of Holy Scripture. And I have a distinct fear in my heart as I speak about Samson tonight, but I'm constrained to do so, and I feel I must share with you some of the sordid facts of the case, in order that we may discern something of God's grace, and hear perhaps God's warning to an age that is very similar indeed to the age in which Samson lived.

Now there are aspects of Samson's life then which are positively nauseating to read. I've no doubt that as Mr. Lowe began to read that sixteenth chapter tonight, some of you found a little jerk in your spirits, because of the things to which it refers. But that's just it.

The Word of God addresses things exactly as they are. God is the faithful witness, and the Word of God is true. And it is a mirror of life as it has been, and as it is.

And on that account of course, this passage, like every other passage, has its own way of addressing us in our very sordid civilization in 1985. Now the first thing I would like you to notice in the life of this man Samson is the almost total rule of lust. It's a strange thing to have to say it.

It sounds terrible to have to announce from a pulpit, but there was a man in the Old Testament who ruled the ancient people of God, who was almost completely dominated by his own lust. Lust is passion run wild. It's the mastery of life by what was meant to be its servant.

The exercise of unlimited rule by a power that was meant to be under constant control. In consequence of such a reversal of the divinely ordained order of things, chaos inevitably and invariably follows. When controlled or righteously of course, these latent human desires given us by the Creator have a high and a noble intention and goal in mind.

But once they get out of control, they turn man into a beast and they turn society into a moral jungle. They bring kings from their thrones and angels from their thrones likewise. Kingdoms and civilizations that have long and successfully withstood the power of mailed armor have withered to the scrap heap because of infernal lust within.

Now believe it or not, Samson was the son of a God-fearing father and mother, and this is where the sad story begins. If he was a child of some of our modern homes, then you might not be so surprised at the issue. But Samson was the child of a very, very godly home.

His parents were, one might almost say, peculiarly godly. He was a very special gift of God to a couple who were bent on the glory of God in an age when very few people were. You know, I feel one should interject here and say this.

Some children of godly parentage need to be told that they have not arrived in this world simply due to the turn of biological processes, but they have come by the intervention of God in answer to prayer. Some children need to be told that. Samson was a case in point.

He was born, he was conceived in the womb in answer to prayer, and he was a gift of God to his parents and to his nation. Because he was thus given, his parents dedicated himself to the service of the Lord from the very beginning. I have no doubt it was a very lovely, a very wholesome, and perhaps a very holy occasion when his father and his mother brought him, and whatever the nature of the service exactly, they dedicated the boy to the glory and the service of the God who had given him to them.

I personally, I'm reading in, maybe when I say this, but I have in my heart the feeling that that they really expected something from this boy when they called him Samson. You see, the name Samson is somehow or other, never mind how quite, but it is somehow or other related to the Hebrew word for sun, s-u-n, shemesh, and somehow or other they looked upon this little bundle of babyhood in their hands as if the sun was risen. And here has come someone into the darkness of the hour to bring light and life and hope and joy and a new day.

Samson is born, a sun is risen, but actually a sun never shone. It was under a cloud from the very beginning apart from one or two minor incidents when something extraordinary seemed to manifest itself. Actually there were only one or two such promising signs emerging in the early years of Samson as far as we can read from the record, causing his parents perhaps to believe that their dreams were true, but only to be disappointed a little later on.

We read, for example, in Judges 13 verses 24 and 25, just after it records the birth of the boy, he grew and the Lord blessed him. So the Lord's blessing was upon him in his youth, and the spirit of the Lord began to stir him. That's a very remarkable statement.

The spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he was in Mahanedan between Zorah and Eshteroth. Doubtless all this raised the hopes of his parents that we can't say exactly what it meant, but something happened. They were doomed, as we have already said, to disappointment in due course.

Those early promises were not fulfilled. They came to nothing. On the contrary, Samson became more and more body and less and less soul.

Almost everything thereafter recorded of him depicts his soul becoming more and more shriveled and impoverished. Even as his body became stronger, he became physically a giant and his soul shriveled to a dwarf state. Wherever he went, he brought darkness rather than light, dishonor rather than respect and hope.

You know, it is a sad spectacle to see this judge of Israel proving to be more morally dangerous to Israel's enemies than militarily so. He was a moral nuisance more than he was a military nuisance. And so deterioration having set in rather early, though we cannot give the details, scripture does not tell us, but that deterioration continued.

The process we have briefly hinted at continued apace throughout the years of his life. The deterioration took the form of an ever-increasing desecration of everything that was holy. You saw the man growing into a physical giant, but every inch of his massive frame, every gift he possessed, all the potentiality of body and soul, everything seemed to be harnessed just to give vent to his lust and his passion.

Though everything was dedicated to God in his early days, now everything is used to dishonor the Lord. It's a very sad picture. Reared in a Nazarite, as a Nazarite by parents whose hearts were set on this, he was disciplined, you remember, not to touch, as every Nazarite was, not to touch anything that was unclean, not to drink wine or shave his head as a symbol of his spiritual dedication to the Lord.

There was meaning to this, I shall mention it before we close, more than I can now. Yet one by one, Samson desecrated every single gift. He broke every single vow, and he used everything that he was and had for his own evil purpose.

And he became physically involved in one orgy of passion after another, until you really wonder what's going to happen next. And it is, as one ancient commentator put it, it is with a sense of great relief that one sees Samson as a corpse, dead. Thus Samson's energies and gifts became wholly dissipated.

I repeat, what was dedicated to God became completely desecrated by sin. And with thoughtless, frivolous self-satisfaction, he went from one escapade to another, until he finally ended up in the tragedy reported at the end of Judges chapter 16. Now in all this we see him defying the Almighty God, to whom he owed his life, and to whom he was dedicated from his childhood.

His every deed seems to have been a provocation of God's holy wrath. And it is, it is, it is awesome, really awesome, it is frightening to find that wherever Samson appeared, in all these records, wherever he appeared, it is either to destroy men or to debase women. And you read the story, you read the story.

It is either to destroy men or debase women, folk. Either or. There is very little else in this man's life.

And so we come to what I would refer to as an almost total loss of luster altogether. I say almost, because there may well have been features in his life that the scriptures don't tell us about. I would love to think that.

The picture, as far as we see in scripture, is a terribly dark picture. Knowing his spiritual pedigree, we might be tempted to hope still for some change. But the record progresses only to show the tragedy getting, as we've said, darker and darker, bleaker and bleaker, until the end comes in ignominy and shame and death.

Now the record moves gradually towards that climax, stressing the character of, at that stage, the ignoble women whom he befriended. And particularly, of course, the one whose name is Delilah. Her nationality is more in doubt than her character.

Though she has actually spared the disreputable title given to another of her class in the first verse of chapter 16, she is no better than a prostitute. And she is in league with the Philistines. Whether she was a Philistine or not, we're not quite sure.

But she was in league with the Philistines, who hated Samson and hated the Israelites. And you remember, as soon as Samson became involved with her, she began her beguiling ministrations with insidious mastery. Here was most certainly a woman who was under demonic control.

She had her inspiration. She knew how to do what she wanted to do. She enticed Samson so completely that his capacity for rational thought seems to have been completely overwhelmed.

It's uncanny. He just wouldn't believe it if it weren't in the book. But a man who could be the ruler of his people should lose control over his capacity to think rationally.

But he does. And passion can do that. Unbridled passion, passion run wild, can so wreak havoc in the realm of person's thinking that he becomes incapable of rational thought.

And here is one of the tragic cases that the Bible refers to. He was as a man bewitched, mesmerized by this woman. He slept with his head on a lap.

He became insensitive to obvious warnings that were given him from one source or another until he finally opens to her the secret of his heart and of his great strength. Now the story is a pathetic one as you read on in chapter 16. And here it is that we come to the climax, the awful climax.

Lulled into insensitivity by the enticements of Delilah, Samson, albeit a little reticent at the beginning, he led her astray twice. He lied to her. He was unwilling at the beginning, but he couldn't withhold.

His passion was too great. He loved her too much. And her charms, finally he gave in.

And he told her, if you shave the hair of my head, I will be exactly like another person. I will have no more strength than anybody else. And there's a reason for this, because I'm a Nazarite.

And he tells her, he opens his heart to her, and probably says more, enlarges upon what we have here in a kind of shorthand report in scripture. And then when he's told her everything, she gets him to sleep. We're not told again how all this happened.

We have to read between the lines. You see, it's a shorthand record. But she got him to sleep all right.

She knew how to do that. And when he was asleep, she said, Samson, the Philistines are upon you. What? And you can see the big old giant shaking himself.

Big of body, masculine of body, and muscular. Here he shakes himself free of his sleep, and he stands on his two high legs. And he says, I will go out as at other times.

But there was something he didn't know. A spirit of God had departed from him. And because the spirit of God, the source of his strength, was vanished, he was not the man he was.

He has lost something. He did not know that the Lord had left him. Grieved a thousand times, the Holy Spirit now withdrew his benefits.

And he let the man slip into the self-chosen prison house of his own carnality, leaving him to himself to cope with the things to which he had wedded his own soul. Now the result was fatal. You see, when robbed of his physical strength, poor Samson had nothing left.

What would you have left if you lost your physical strength? Anything? Brother and sister, I suggest to you this is a very important question. What would you, what would I have left if I lost my physical strength? Anything? Nothing? Samson had nothing. He was all body and no soul by this time.

His whole being was demuted of its every semblance of glory and every human prospect of reclamation, lusterless. He falls prisoner to a people he would otherwise have ground to powder. And the tragedy proceeds.

You see the landslide. You see, you see the movement. He's going down, down, down.

There is a bottomless pit that awaits him. With his head on the lap of the ignoble Delilah, we can see Samson moving towards this sad state of affairs. And then his captors got him.

And the first thing they did is to gouge out his eyes. This of course in Philistine, it was the Philistine way of saying, we treat you with the utmost disrespect. It was symbolic of their total mastery over him and their total disrespect for any person.

This is what they did. They gouged out both eyes. The Philistines gouging out of Samson's eyes then exhibited their total anger and disrespect for him.

It was another way of spitting into his face. Many another Samson has lost his vision along the same path, not physically perhaps. This is one thing that happens when unbridled passion rules in a life.

A man or a woman loses his or her vision. Time was when God was evident in his providence, in his grace, in his will, in everything. God and God's will was clear.

But when passion rules and holds the reins, vision vanishes. Haven't you seen it? I have. Not only did they gouge out his eyes, but they bound him with bronze shackles.

He was deprived of liberty. Having so long been a man who was subject to no one else's requirements, moving where he would and how he would and whenever he would, a man who was master of himself, complete master of himself in one sense, though slave to himself in another sense, who chose what he would do and obeyed no one else. Here he is at last deprived of movement, deprived of liberty.

Samson the giant in prison and his feet in bronze shackles that he could not break. He tore everything, but he couldn't tear these. Put new cart ropes over his hands and bind his wrists and his arms.

They were just like a little bit of flax before the flame, but he couldn't touch these. These stayed on, though Samson was a giant. All the philistines knew what they were doing.

They were determined to humble him to the very dust if they could. I've seen others move in that way, spiritually if not physically. They've got into a prison house from which they have cried to get out and wept and wept.

But it seemed that they too were in bronze shackles. But look, it doesn't end there. The philistines set him in the prison to grind corn in the prison house.

Now this may not mean very much to us, but it does mean much in its own context. It really is the climax of the whole thing. We miss the shame involved in this in a philistine society because we do not commonly appreciate that a woman really took a subservient place in philistine society.

This was a woman's work or the work of an ass. Sorry ladies, that's not me, but that's history. The woman was unquestionably inferior in philistine thought at this time and it was the woman's job or the job of an ass to grind out the corn in the prison house.

And you see what they're doing to Samson is this. They're going to humble him to the very dust and ashes. They'll give the giant a woman's work to do or the work of a donkey.

They not only rob him of vision and liberty, but they set him to do a maid's work in a prison house. How completely unjointed is this once great leader of Israel so-called. The way of the transgressor is hard.

Neither was Samson the only one you know who has walked that way. Do you know your history? If you do, you will know of many many illustrations of men who have gone this way. This is not the time nor the place to advertise this kind of thing, but I will refer to one as we go.

The Greek giant Hercules, to mention one only, dandied and played so long with Omphale, queen of Lydia, that he became something in her lap very much what Samson became in the lap of Delilah. Hercules spent his massive energies, believe it or not, winding and carding wool for his mistress. That's how he spent his time.

Could anything be more humiliating? Especially, especially whilst Omphale wore the skin of a Nemean lion. So history tells us, which Hercules had killed to procure for her at great peril to himself. Now imagine the man.

Here is the giant who killed the lion just as Samson did, and she's wearing the skin of the Nemean lion, and he is content, he is content to be carding, carding wool and winding wool into a ball with his mistress. Of all the creatures one sees caged in a zoo, one's heart, my heart at any rate, goes out very specially to the eagle. I don't know how you feel.

When I visit the zoo, I'm very happy with, with animals, but my heart aches for some of them. Oh, you may say they're very contemptive. Well, I wonder.

But I'm always very sorry when I see in the zoo, in a cage, an eagle caged, an eagle of all creatures, made with vast pinions, capable of soaring into highest heaven, with eyes to look into the very brightness of the sun itself, and there it is in a cage. And it matters very little whether he's spending his strength to hurt himself against the bars, or whether he's settled down to it all, and agreed to become a prisoner without any fuss. It doesn't matter.

It's a tragedy writ large. Did I say there was no greater tragedy? If I said that, I made a mistake. There is one greater.

It's the child of godly parents, dedicated to the Lord, upon whom the Spirit of God began to move. And a work of grace began to appear, and it seemed as if it was the dawn of a new day, and you could almost say there's light there. But the sun never shone.

The day never dawned. The promise was never fulfilled. On the contrary, it seemed as if the train was set in reverse, and the movement was not forwards, but backwards, and backwards, and backwards into shame, and catastrophe.

The last thing I have to speak about is the partial recovery of this lost power and luster. Thank God the story does not quite end there. There is not much more to add, but there is something, and that something is very significant.

I'd like you to notice this very specially. Scripture does not end the record in terms of a recovery so great, and so glorious, and so complete, that anyone can get the impression that sin does not matter. You cannot read the story of Samson and then come to the conclusion a man can sin as much as he wants, and rebel as far as he can.

God will forgive. All will be well at last. It doesn't matter very much.

You can't read that here. But then there is something one has to put alongside of that. Neither can a man read the story of Samson without seeing a glimmer of hope for the penitent.

And you see there is a balance here. This morning we were talking about another kind of balance in scripture. Well we're with it again tonight.

You see sometimes we preachers can so preach about the forgiveness of God that we can convey the impression, sin as much as you can, or as much as you will, or as much as you must, though no one, there is no must to sin. But we say it's all right. God will forgive, and God will forget, and we convey the awful impression, the false impression, the mad impression that sin does not matter.

Now our fathers could preach the gospel better than we can. Somehow or other we moderns have lost the art of preaching forgiveness so sweet, and so full, and so free on the one hand, and yet conveying the certainty to men, sin is a loathsome sin, a loathsome thing, a horrible thing. Here you find the Holy Spirit leading the writer of scripture to walk this narrow ledge without veering to the one or to the other.

I just want to say a word about both of them before we close. My heart yearns as I conclude this message that the episode will strike the fear of sin more into my own soul and into yours. I feel that we need a little

more of this, the fear of sin, the dread of sin, in myself especially, but in others also.

You know there is a hymn of Charles Wesley's. We don't sing it very often. It's not, yes it is in our book, but it's set to a tune which is unmanageable as far as Knox is concerned.

We've tried it out a few times, and it really, it's unmanageable. But there are two stanzas in this hymn which go like this. I want a godly fear, a quick discerning eye that looks to thee when sin is near and sees the tempter fly, a spirit still prepared and armed with jealous care, forever standing on its guard and watching unto prayer.

Listen to this. I want a true regard, a single steady aim, unmoved by threatening or reward to thee and thy great name, a jealous just concern for thine immortal praise, a pure desire that all may learn and glorify thy grace. I have a yearning for that, for me and for this congregation, and for the people of God at large, a dread of sin that runs away from it.

More than that, however, I sincerely pray that the perusal of the dark bit of biography of an Old Testament character will not leave anyone who may have yielded to some of the same temptations in unrelieved gloom. Now, Samson experienced partial recovery. The hair of his head began to grow again.

I don't think I shall ever get over the electric shock, spiritually speaking, of reading and recognizing what that meant for the first time not all that long ago. The hair of his head that had been shaved by the Philistines began to grow again. You see, Samson's long hair was symbolic of his commitment and consecration to God, and on its adverse side, of the strength that he enjoyed as he honored his Nazarite vows.

That strength was not in his hair itself. This is where people go astray. You see, the strength was not in the hair itself.

By the time this passage was written, Samson's hair must have been down to his hips. But the strength was not in the hair itself. The hair was symbolic of something.

It was symbolic of his commitment and of his dedication, which of course he was not loyal to. But God in mercy, nevertheless. You see, God's mercy is always greater than our sin.

God allowed him to have strength, even when sin had come in. And for a long time, God's mercy was gracious. God's mercy continued, and he had strength.

But the hair was only a symbol of all that. That strength was not in his hair itself. It was God's gift.

The hair was symbolic. Now, it is my conviction that when Samson's hair began to grow again, that this is not something natural and normal. When you cut your hair, it grows again.

And even people like myself have to go to the hairdressers every now and again. I don't give him a lot of trouble, but I have to go and see him. And some of you are in the same category, I see, from this vantage point.

But you know, even if you shaved your head, your hair would grow again, naturally. But I don't think that's what we've got here. I think that what we've got here is something supernatural.

I believe that when this man found himself in prison and humiliated, and when he lost his physical sight, his two eyes were gouged out, he began to see things morally and spiritually for the first time, when truth began to dawn, and realities broke in that never had broken into his benighted soul. And for the first time, I believe, this man showed some measure of penitence. Now you say to me, I can almost hear you.

I don't know who it is, but there's somebody here who says, why do you say that? How can you say that? It doesn't say that in Scripture. I know it doesn't say that in Scripture. Well then, how can you say it? I'll tell you.

I'll tell you. One reason for my believing that lies in the fact that we find Samson among the worthies of Hebrews 11. Huh? Did you remember that? Samson, this man.

Hey, take your breath away. Samson in Hebrews 11. A man of faith.

One of the great. Well now, where did Samson's faith come in? Where did Samson manifest faith? Anywhere. Not in the early part of his life.

It never came to anything. Not in the middle of his life. It could not have been, if the record is accurate, and I believe it is, until the very end.

And it must have been during that prison scene in Gaza, when he was reduced to rubble and to nothing. It must have been there, when without any hope apparently, the man began to experience the grace of penitence, of repentance in some measure. And God, oh merciful Father, God granted that the hair of his head should grow again.

The symbol is coming back. And little by little, along with the symbol that became evident, became the strength that was not yet evident to the Philistines, until at last on that day, he asked the slave that was leading him around as a blind man, take me to the pillars on which the temple depends. And he put his two massive hands upon those two pillars, and you remember what happened.

How he tore the whole place down, and the three thousand on the gallery, and the multitudes underneath, the Philistines died with him. Samson's experience of partial recovery. Partial recovery.

And you see, this makes a world of difference to an understanding of Samson's life now. You see, if this is true, then Samson's death at the end was not a suicide, neither was it a matter of altogether unqualified revenge against his captors, though that is an element the scriptures tell us. But it was more than that.

It was Samson acting as a man of faith, as the leader of Israel, to cause some indication to the enemies, the enemies of his own self and of his nation, that Jehovah is God. You see, I'm coming towards the close, so I must summarize what I wanted to say. God and Samson's parents working together under divine command, the parents working under the Lord's command, had brought him up as a Nazirite, as we've already indicated.

And this was a special calling. It had two orders to it. There was a temporary order of Nazirites.

You became a Nazirite for a period, or you might become a permanent Nazirite, and there are only three mentioned in scripture, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. The Nazirite calling was to fortify the future judge against the fierce temptations that the Philistines would bring. Let me enlarge a little upon that.

Why was Samson brought up a Nazirite? What was the divine purpose? This, that he should be prepared from a youth not to touch anything unclean, not to drink anything that would take his senses away, not to do things that would make him less than a giant, not only physically but spiritually and morally. That's the purpose of it. In order that he might make the God of Israel known to the people of the plains, the Philistines.

But you see, Samson's calling was not fulfilled. His divine mission was not fulfilled. His passion robbed him of his calling.

And even though something of his luster or of his power was returned to him at last, I want you to notice this, and this is one of the serious elements of it all. It was not to rule over Israel. It was simply to deal a blow at Israel's foes.

Samson missed his calling. Even so, God, the God of mercy, granted him a sense of shame that was altogether a new factor in his life. And with that came a token of hope.

But the last thing of all with which I must conclude is this. Samson was only partially recovered and restored. As I've said, he never recovered his sight again.

His feet were never liberated again whilst he was alive, only after he died. And the only thing he was allowed to do, the only thing he was allowed to do, was to give the enemies of God and of Israel one mighty stroke. And he died with them.

Brothers and sisters, sin is a terrible thing. Oh, God forgives. Oh, God's grace is wide as the ocean, high as the heavens, deep as the ocean.

But that does not give any man liberty to go on in sin. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How can we that have died to sin, and that's the meaning of becoming a Christian, live therein? No, no, no.

We've died and risen again. That is the Christian experience. Sin is a terrible thing.

And though God's grace may come to us and renew us partially in the closing days of our life, and grant us the grace of penitents who have wandered far on passion's way, there will be some things that we will not have been able to do with our lives. A mission incomplete, if it's even if started. When the seas are calm and the sun is bright, we don't need a lighthouse along the shores.

But when the skies are dark and the gale is blowing, and we know that there are sunken reefs and quicksands, oh, it is a welcome sight, if you're sailing on a ship to see a lighthouse flashing, flashing, flashing, and it tells you, don't come too near. Samson is such a life. Every flash of experience tells you, man, woman of God, don't follow me.

Don't come too close. Keep away from here. There are quicksands.

There are perils. There is danger. Steer your buck another way.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I bid you to life. Take a good look at Samson. In this debauched age of passion run riot, take a look at this man who let it rip, and in all the wild orgy of his life, got everything he wanted, missed God's purpose, landed in a dungeon in more senses than one, and was saved by the skin of his teeth.

He's saying something. Do you hear what he says? God grant it. For his name's sake, let us pray.

Oh, Lord, our God and Father, we never cease to thank you and never will cease to thank you for your word. We are amazed that the Holy Spirit has recorded some of these episodes, and yet we seem to sense the reason why. When we look at ourselves in the mirror and when we, in the mirror of your truth, and when we consider the nature of society around us.

Heavenly Father, grant us to hear the voice of this wreck of a man, this wreck of a giant who was un-gianted, and who, apart from your almighty grace, would have been utterly and irretrievably and eternally ruined. Blessed God, let us hear what he's saying to us, or rather, what you are saying to us through him. And may we follow the light and be obedient to the heavenly vision, for your glory in Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen.

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