

In Greek Mythology... Achilles was the son of Peleus... king of Myrmidons... and Thetis... a sea goddess. ... Achilles was the greatest... bravest... and most handsome warrior in his 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 magic power of the water... Achilles became invulnerable in every part... except his heel... by which he was held. ... The small part... untouched by water... was vulnerable. ... This story gives us the term - "Achilles heel"... which refers to our greatest point of vulnerability. ... It was in the heel that Achilles was struck by an arrow and killed.

Each one of us has an Achilles heel... that is... we all have a vulnerable area in our walk with God. ... For some who are in this room... it may be money... for others it is ambition... or fame... popularity... pride... or selfishness. ... But... God... being rich in grace and mercy... uses us anyway... for His Kingdom purposes. ... For Samson... his "Achilles heel" was sensuality. ... He had a passion for sensual, seductive women.

Oscar Wilde the unrestrained worldly Irish writer... poet... and playwright from the 1800's said, "*I can resist anything except temptation. The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.*" ... That pretty much seems to summarize the philosophy of Samson... which (as we will see in today's text) led to the ruin of his life. ... He toyed with temptation and it destroyed him.

More than once... we have seen Samson roaming off the right pathway... and onto an evil pathway... where he had no business going. This problem was evident from the very beginning of his experiences recorded in

Scripture. His roving feet led him to Timnath... where the ungodly Philistines live... and got him in trouble because he placed his eyes and heart firmly upon a Philistine girl. *"I want her... Get her for me... because she looks good to me..."* he demanded of his parents. When his parents acquiesced to his petulant demand... and went with him to Timnath to make arrangements for the wedding... Samson again got to roving... this time into a vineyard which anyone who took a Nazarite vow (as Samson had) was supposed to avoid. ... Now in the last days of his life... he is guilty of roving again. ... His roving spirit leads him back into Philistine country... and back into serious trouble.

Last week's passage... indicates that Samson had overcome... somewhat... his passion for personal revenge. He has probably been walking with the Lord and judging Israel for about 20 years. ... But we discover today... that once again... lust-filled temptation and sin raise their ugly head. ... He must master it... or it will consume him.

So here he is... 40 years old... unmarried... a judge of Israel... a man who has helped bring peace and prosperity through the power of the Lord to Israel... and where does he go? ... To Gaza... one of the five major cities of the Philistines... about 35 miles from his home town.

Gaza was a place of spiritual decay. ... It was a place of sensuality and wickedness. ... Samson toys with temptation... and spiritually - he rapidly decays. ... He had no business being in this town. ... He paved the way for his own destruction by being there.

It does matter where you spend your time. If you spend your time in the wrong places you will pay the price in your character. Evil places contain evil people. The Word of God warns us to avoid places that are Satanic traps.

Proverbs 4:14-15 (ESV)

Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.

It would seem as though Samson was a man who got to do everything he ever wanted to do in life. ... If he wanted a wife... he demanded that his father get him a wife. ... He destroyed those who angered him for good reasons or bad. ... He traveled freely among his kinsmen and his enemies with complete fearlessness. ... In today's narrative... we will see him stride into the enemy city of Gaza... see a prostitute he likes... have her... and take off with the gates of the city on his shoulders... terrifying everybody around him. ... No one ever hindered Samson to do whatever he wanted. But Samson's problem was that he didn't know **what to want** in life... the desires that drove him were all aimed at the wrong things.

Does the idea of unrestricted freedom (to do whatever you want) seem like a good idea to you? ... Perhaps every time you turn around... you're being buffeted by some pressure... restricted by some wall... or under some burden. Do you ever feel frustrated at your inability to do the things that you wish you could do...?

Samson's story has been living proof... that getting to do whatever you want... is a very bad option... ... **unless you want the right things...**

unless you have learned to crucify the desires and inclinations in yourself... that will send you off in the wrong direction. ... God places restrictions... walls... and impediments in our lives... and lays burdens on us... precisely to teach us to want different things... than we otherwise would. ... We are being taught... if we'll listen... to become aware of the unseen realities... to long for Heaven... to care more about the presence and peace of God in our lives... than whatever our friends who are of the world... can offer us.

Judges 16:1

As he is going down south to the Mediterranean coast... we can almost hear the Lord saying, "*Where are you going, Samson?*" ... "Who... me...? Oh... I'm just going down the road, Lord." ... "*I know, but what are you thinking of doing down the road? That's not part of our territory.*" "Yeah! – Yeah! ... I'm just gonna check on our enemy... Lord. See what they're up to. Perhaps I can hold them at bay somewhat... You know... intimidate them from harassing Your people... I wanna see if they're still afraid of me..."

This was not an accident. ... Samson did not wander over to Gaza... and happen to "fall into sin"... Behind every sinful tragedy there is a process of wicked thinking.

We can't help it when Satan tempts us. ... He is going to do this. ... But when we tempt ourselves... and toy with temptation... we become our own enemy! ... Some people get so far from God they don't need to be tempted in order to sin. ... All they need is an opportunity and they tempt themselves. ... Samson has his opportunity and he fulfills his desires.

This was Philistine country. It was fraught with iniquity. Samson knew what he was doing by going there. ... Believers must stay away from places like this... or they will be ensnared by sin.

Judges 16:2

Samson was a marked man. He had slain many Philistines and was Israel's judge. Being enemies of Israel, the Philistines would be alert to Samson's presence, for they were on the lookout for him.

The Philistines let Samson have his fling and rest. Sin has a way of staying its hands of obvious trouble... until a man is entangled by its curse. You may not feel entangled by your sin the moment you begin living an ungodly life. ... You may not feel the sting of sin for years... but eventually it will catch up with you and enslave you.

- Ask the *alcoholic* if he feels the sting of liquor.
- Ask the *divorced person* if the loss of relationships and financial devastation was worth the infidelity... which cost them their marriage
- Ask the *promiscuous girl* who is sterile because she contracted a sexually transmitted disease if she feels the sting of immorality.
- Ask the pornography addict if porn can ever satisfy without desiring more and needing to be more explicit. And ask them about their sense of shame.
- Ask the *drug addict* what it is like continually having to break into homes to steal in order to buy another day's dose.

It may take a while, but your sin sooner or later catches up with you and finds you out. Sin is patient, slowly wrapping its fingers of death around

your soul. Only the grace of God can break sin's hold through the power of Jesus Christ.

Verse two also says... **"They kept quiet all night"** - Many times sin is quiet in regards to its work. Sin advertises itself very deceitfully. Sin wants us to believe it is peaceful and offers no threats. Promoters present alcohol as fun and gambling as your economic savior and as great entertainment. Hollywood rarely shows the aftermath of all the extra-marital affairs that it portrays. ... No... The promoters are very quiet about the consequences of their sin. The pleasures are put on the front page but the penalties are put on the back... loss of jobs... bill collectors... broken marriages... vengeful spouses... abused women and children... and the list goes on and on. Sin is always quiet about its true character. This makes it more effective in seducing men and women. So often we hear people say... **"If I only knew what was waiting on the end of that path... I would never have walked it..."** ... The gates of a sinful life are *pleasant* and *alluring* but the end is *putrid* and *afflictive*.

Judges 16:3

But Samson woke up at midnight. (That's not part of the rules.) The Philistines assumed Samson would be like everyone else... and stay until morning. Besides... how would he get out...? He is trapped inside the city... because the gates are closed and locked tight. ... But Samson went whistling out to the gates of the city... (*"Hmmm... I'm locked in... Well... OK..."*) and he just picks up the city gates... made of iron... and the post to hold these two-story high iron gates (we know this from some

archaeological ruins near Tel Aviv)... puts them on his back and walks 37 miles up to Mt. Hebron, up the mountain.

What was this all about...? It isn't just about Samson getting out of his trouble. In ancient times a city's gates were its pride. If your city had strong gates... you were well protected from the enemy. Since powerful cities had walls... the gates were the weakest part of that defense. Once a city's gates gave way... the city could easily be captured. ... So cities would fortify their gates as much as they could. They took pride in their strong gates. ... As long as the city gates held... that city was safe against its attackers. But whenever a conquering army would defeat a city... the gates of the defeated city would be taken home... as a trophy for the conquerors.

So why did Samson do this. He is mocking the Philistines... embarrassing them... and intimidating them. He pulls up and takes their gates as Israel's trophy over the strongest city of the Philistines. ... This... by the way... is a picture of the victory we are to be having as a Church over Satan. Jesus said in Matthew.

Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Gaza's city gates were no match for Samson... and the gates of Hell are no match for the church. The question is... are we effectively attacking Satan's kingdom...?

Samson lifted the gates... but it was the grace of God that delivered him. This was the last time... however. ... Instead of letting the mercy of God move him to repentance... he got false ideas that he was immune to the

Philistines. ... (LISTEN) We must NEVER allow God's grace and mercy to encourage future sin in us... rather than repentance of past sin. ...

Perverting grace into that which justifies past sin and encourages future sin because you won't get caught... is seen as taboo in Jude 4...

Jude 1:4 (ESV)

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Then there was Delilah... the only woman mentioned by name in the Samson stories. Whether she was Philistine or Israelite does not matter – it didn't even matter to Delilah; all that mattered was Philistine money...

Judges 16:4-5

Samson has enjoyed the thrill of victory by escaping the Philistines and carrying away the city gates up the hill before Hebron thirty-eight miles away. Now he is about to experience for the first time the agony of defeat. We are now entering one of the most famous stories of the Bible. A story that has everything Hollywood LOVES... a blend of sex, love, violence, deception, and tragedy. The tragedy we find is not unique because Christians today are losing their spiritual strength for the same reasons that we find in this chapter. ... It is not the power of sin that overwhelms us, but our own unwillingness to depend on the strength of the Lord to close the door of sin for us.

The close call in Gaza isn't enough to put the fear of God into Samson, for he succumbs to the charms of another woman. ... Delilah is from the

Valley of Sorek, which means “Valley of Choice Vines.”

As a Nazirite, Samson is supposed to abstain from the fruit of the vine, so he’s skating close to the edge again, as when he journeyed to the vineyards of Timnah... Furthermore, the Valley of Sorek, like Timnah and Gaza, is Philistine country. ... It is always dangerous to linger on enemy borders.

Borderline... lukewarm Christians want to live the lifestyle of the world... yet, receive the blessings of the Lord. ... They want to straddle the fence and live as close to the crowd as possible. ... James describes these folks as double minded and unstable in all their ways (James 1:8).

When Christians live on the border... half on and half off... half hot and half cold... half in and half out... they will be weakened... impoverished... and brought down spiritually as they are entangled by the Delilah's of this world. The lukewarm Christian is ineffective because his life is wrapped up in himself and his carnal sins instead of matters of spiritual significance. The third chapter of Revelation indicates that this kind of believer makes God sick... to the point that He spews them out of His mouth (vs. 16). Satan uses a number of Delilah's to entangle and weaken God's people. The Delilah of drink... drugs... devious friends... lewd joking... vile language and behavior... pornography... and deception.

Temptation comes when we choose the wrong companions. Paul gave us a warning in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV)

Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”

Judges 16:6-14

It is obvious that Samson enjoyed displaying his extraordinary strength. Samson seemed to enjoy himself... playing with her like a cat sometimes plays with a mouse. ... All these phony explanations of his strength simply gave him opportunity to show his strength and gain the ohs and ahs of Delilah. ...And by the way... I think that the Philistine soldiers stayed hidden... Samson never knew they were hiding and ready to pounce... So Samson continued to amuse himself by playing the game. ... But Samson was not given his endowments for self-glory. ... God gives gifts to accomplish worthwhile work for God. Samson needed to use his strength to deliver Israel, not to show off in front of Delilah and the soldiers.

Samson was using his talents and abilities frivolously for his own self glory. Instead of showing off, Samson should have been using his strength to attack and deliver Israel from the Philistines. The abilities that God has given you are to be used for His glory!

The third deception came very close to the truth. He directs attention to his hair. Samson lives very dangerously. His actions reflect those who want to play as close to the edge as possible. They go as far as they can without crossing the line into the forbidden. Rather than seeing how holy and upright they can be, some Christians see how far they can dabble in the forbidden and still stay clean. They go to questionable places, do questionable things, and run around with questionable people.

Isn't it interesting how we love to see how close to sin we can get? We think we're in charge, and we just kept getting closer and closer: "After all,

God didn't send any thunder and lightning when I was in Gaza. I got out of that one." ... This kind of attitude will push you off a cliff and create major problems for you as it did for Samson.

Judges 16:15-20

This was an expensive haircut that cost him his strength, discernment, honor, freedom, and comfort. Sin has a way of sapping our strength. Advertisements claim that sinful pleasures will make us happy. But... that is a lie!

Samson's relationship with the Lord had deteriorated so much that he did not realize the Lord left him. He took the strength and presence of God for granted and now it is gone! ... (LISTEN) ... When you resist the Lord continually... He will eventually leave you alone.

His parents had warned him about the Philistine women... and God bailed him out. ... He set out on a road of personal vengeance and his own people captured him... but God bailed him out. ... He went into a harlot and almost was captured again... but God bailed him out. ... He went to Delilah and he had three chances to get out... but God did not bail him out because he said to Samson, "*Excuse me, is that what you really want? Then you can have it.*"

That's the wrath of God. Sometimes we get involved in sin and because there is **no thunder and lightning**. ... We think we have gotten away with something. ... God is just seeing what we really want. He bails us out for a period and then He doesn't bail us out any more. He lets us have it.

Now... let's be very clear about something else here... Samson's strength was not in his hair. ... His hair was a symbol of his dependence on the strength of God... so when his hair was shaved off his Nazirite vow and covenant were cut. Samson had broken his Nazirite vow many times... but his hair was the final vestige of that vow... once he denigrated the last element... he thought... "*I will go out as at other times and shake myself free,*" but he didn't know that the Lord had departed from him.

Judges 16:21

Sin's pleasures soon end. ... Grinding grain into flour was usually done with millstones and was the job of the lowest members of society.

Judges 16:22-24

I have heard believers today ask... "What's the matter with sexual immorality if it's between two consenting adults and it doesn't harm anyone?" ... I'll tell you who it harms. In this family (the body of Christ... the church) it harms the very name of God. It gives our enemies a chance to mock our God.

Judges 16:25-31

Samson wants to be strengthened so he can avenge himself on the Philistines who gouged out his eyes, but God says, "No. I'll strengthen you so that I can fulfill what I began in your life--to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines--and in spite of your sin I'm still going to keep My plan right on schedule."

Every Christian at one time or another has failed in his Christian walk. We mess UP... fall DOWN... cave IN... wash OUT. ... There are times when our GIVING goes on the blink... we GIVE IN (compromise)... GIVE OUT (tired)... GIVE UP (quit)... ... We fail... so what happens when we do? ... Does God stick us on a shelf... or bench us from His team for the rest of our lives... while we watch others do what we can no longer do?

Praise God... because the Lord is in the business of restoring failures... delivering the defeated... and boosting the beaten!

The crucial issue in life is not whether we fail... but how we fail. There is such a thing as failing forward... That means learning from what we have done wrong... and laying hold of the forgiveness of God. ... The only other alternatives are to wallow in remorse... self-pity... excuse-making... and accusations. ... If we respond this way we will be overwhelmed by our failures and mistakes and never learn from them. ... Let me ask you, "Which one is your response... forward or backward?"

The saddest position of all is the person who lives unaware of his failures. This person does not see or admit his mistakes. You cannot learn from what you will not admit. You cannot help a person who does not want help or see their need for help. ... Samson was the kind of man who failed to recognize that he had an Achilles heel. Because of his lust-filled passions... He continually disobeyed the Word of God and violated his vow. His life was one failure, flaw, flop, and fall after another. Samson thought he was getting away with disobedience because the effects of his sin were not immediate but gradual. His sin, however, did catch up with him. It always does! Galatians 6:7, 8

Galatians 6:7-8 (ESV)

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

So... as God closes the curtain on Samson's life... we are somewhat disappointed. ... He had great advantages and much potential! He had the opportunity to deliver Israel completely from the Philistines... but his wild... wayward life robbed him of his potential. ... - It robs us too!

Apathy... unconcern for the matters of the Master will ruin our testimony for Christ. ... Samson's sin caused him to be captured by the enemy and robbed him of his power. ... He was bound... blinded... and grinding at the mill. ... He was mocked and made fun of. What a tragedy!

A greater tragedy is when the church of Jesus Christ... God's people... are not over-powering the gates of Hell... because we are weak... bound... blinded... and ground by the burden of sinful habits. ... The world is not compassionate when it comes to Christians. They will loudly mock our failures.

Samson failed, but God was not finished with him. ... I believe Samson was not finished with God either. A ray of hope is seen in verse 22... his hair began to grow again. The hair began to gradually be restored. With the restoration of the hair came the restoration of the symbol of his Nazarite vow. (Remember... the hair was only an emblem or badge of service.) Samson strength was not from his hair, however, it was from the Lord. If Samson was going to be restored to God's service, it would be a gradual process.

A number of insights about restoration are found in this passage. **First**, if you have grievously sinned and failed, restoration is possible, but will not come quickly. Restoration takes time.

Secondly, you can be forgiven in a moment, but not restored in a moment. It is gradual. Some think restoration comes with forgiveness, but it doesn't.

Forgiveness and restoration are not the same thing. Forgiveness focuses on the sin of the person and restoration focuses on service and trust. Why is restoration to service a gradual process? The answer is because sin takes a toll upon people. This is the **third** insight on this matter.

When a significant failure occurs in our life... it is not because we slipped and fell into sin. ... It is usually the result of sinful habits in our life which are an accumulation of years of disobedience. You may be tolerating sin in your life right now... telling yourself... "It is not as bad as____..." Such tolerance leads to greater... and greater sin... and eventually there will be significant failure.

A **fourth lesson** is the hair grew and was restored but did his eyesight come back or did he cease to be a prisoner? The answer is "No." The consequences of sin may not be totally erased. Sin leaves terrible scars in one's life. The scars may be physical, emotional, or spiritual and in the form of dismemberment, disease, deep depression, or detainment in a prison.

Your relationship with the Lord and others can be restored, but the scars of your sin may disturb your peace and joy for the rest of your life. You can be plagued with regret. You may find yourself saying, "*Why did I do that? What*

was I thinking?" Though some things may be restored, all things are not restored. **Restoration is limited.**

In Samson's case, his strength was restored but not his eyesight or freedom. Samson was restored for one more act. His restoration was limited. Your desire to serve the Lord may return, but the opportunity to serve MAY not be the same because you may have disqualified yourself from some areas of service and leadership. Because of the limitations sin brings into our life, we need to stay as far away as we can from wickedness and carnality.

Proverbs 4:14-15 (ESV)

Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.