

SAMSON AND DELILAH

Week #2 of a 3-Week Series, "Stories of the Bible"

Sunday, August 6, 2023

Rev. Richard Maraj

Okay, so I've got to be upfront; the joke I'm about to tell is really bad. But I'm still going to tell it. So here we go.

The husband brings home one of his buddies unexpectedly for dinner at 6 p.m. And while he's waiting in the living room, he could hear the wife yelling at the husband in the bedroom. And she yells, "How could you do this? How could you bring someone without any warning? My hair isn't done; I've got no make-up on. The house is a mess. There are dishes still in the sink. And I didn't get very much sleep last night, and I'm still in my pajamas. I'm not in the mood to cook you or anybody else dinner. How could you be so inconsiderate? And how could you do that: inviting him without letting me know?"

And the husband pauses and says, "Because he was thinking of getting married."

[Congregation groans and laughs] Bad joke. It's a bad joke. See I told you it was a bad joke! [Laughs]

So we're in the second week of our three-week series on Bible stories. Last week we looked at David and Goliath. And today we're going to look at a couple that wasn't married, but their relationship and interaction has an important message for us in how to use and how not to lose our spiritual powers. It's the story of Samson and Delilah. It appears in the 16th Chapter in the Book of Judges.

I'll just kind of go over it; I'm sure you're familiar with it. So Samson was an Israelite judge when the judges ruled. And God chose him to rescue the children of Israel from the rivalry Philistines. And Samson was known for his great and incredible power. He killed a lion with his bare hands. He slew a thousand with the jawbone of an animal. He had an extraordinary power that would just surge at moments when he was angry or agitated to super-human levels of strength. You know, you could really say that Samson was kind of like a Biblical version of the Incredible Hulk ... you know, just kind of getting power instantly. And it was amazing and intimidating.

So the Philistines wanted to know: What was the secret to his power? And they knew his weakness was Philistine women, so they hired for 11 pieces of silver a beautiful Philistine woman named Delilah to find out the secret to his power. And he fell in love with her, yadda, yadda, yadda. His secret was no longer a secret.

And so what was his secret to his power, everybody? [Congregants yell out: "Hair."] His hair! And at first you think that's ridiculous: His hair? But when you think about it, we give our hair a lot of power in this culture. [Congregation laughs] I would suggest we spend more money, time, energy and planning on our hair than any other part of our body. I really think so! You ever been to the grocery store, and in the health care section there's two aisles from bottom to top of different hair care products? Shampoos; conditioners; hair gel; hair mousse; hair tonic; hair creme; hair wax. There is hair stuff everywhere!

And shampoos: they can do a lot of things; it's stunning! Shampoos can moisturize, revitalize, fortify; it volumizes and it clarifies. Clarifying shampoo! You're a little confused? Shampoo your hair; it'll all get clear! [Congregation laughs]

Is it surprising that we spend over \$16 billion a year in this country on our hair? What's the last thing we check before we leave the house; never leave the house without checkin' the 'do; checkin' the 'do. Hair affects us in so many ways. In dating! Here's a personal ad: "46-year-old woman. Brown hair; brown eyes. Seeks humorous, sincere male with integrity, honesty and hair." This is actually ...

Hair is so important! It is so important in our lives that, when we start losing our hair, it's a traumatic experience. You know, having to resort to Rogan or the comb-over. I will admit that I was taking a pill because my hair was receding. In fact, it was going so fast, I thought it was retreating, and I took a pill for it. [Congregation laughs]

How many people ever had a bad hair day? How many people ever had a bad haircut? And how many people had your hair kind of looking ugly, but you had to go out, so you wore a baseball cap to cover your ugly hair? [Congregants laugh] Okay!

And I would suggest that our hair sometimes impacts how we feel. On a bad day, I would suggest: If our hair is flat and lifeless, and a bit off, we're a bit flat, lifeless and off. That we don't feel as confident when our hair doesn't look as good. And so when we have a good hair day ... Or how many people have had a great hair day? We've all had great hair days! I believe that, when your hair is full and bouncy, we're full and bouncy. That, honestly, we feel confident when our hair is good.

So the good news is: This story has nothing to do with hair, really. [Congregation laughs] And it really has nothing to do with physical strength, really. It actually is deeper ... There's a deeper spiritual message.

Emmet Fox, the great spiritual teacher, said that every single story in the Bible is a story about you. It is a story about how you deal with the struggles on our spiritual path. It is about how we deal with the struggles in our Godward journey to know our oneness with God.

And so the stories in the Bible use symbolism -- metaphysical ideas beyond the physical -- to give us a personal spiritual message for our lives and how we're living. So each place or character in every story represents some aspect of ourselves. So in this story, the Israelites represent the part in us that is always seeking God; always seeking spiritual truth; always seeking to know our oneness with Spirit.

And the Philistines represent that aspect in us that is opposing and blocking our good; opposing and blocking and denying our spiritual nature and our spiritual power. You could even say it's the part in us that can sometimes undermine ourselves and our own happiness.

Now, Samson represents not just spiritual strength, but he represents our divine potential and those gifts that are in every single one of us that need to be used ... and used with good judgement and wisdom. And then Delilah is that seductiveness -- that part of us that we sometimes let ourselves get enticed or tempted or drawn into various things. You know, like sometimes being lazy and wasting our time. Or maybe cheating. Or maybe overeating or living in fear. Or being stuck in the past. I mean, any of those things that can literally pull us away.

And so allowing ourselves to give into those temptations can really be our downfall, like it was for Samson. And it can drain our spiritual power and our strength like it did with him.

So today we're going to look at three lessons we can learn so that we don't lose or misuse our spiritual power.

And the first one is that **WE'VE GOT TO OWN OUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS**. Samson definitely had the gift of incredible physical strength and power. And like him, every one of us is given a spiritual gift or a talent or a certain ability in our lives. It's in every one of us! Every one of us has spiritual goodness and greatness and ability within ourselves. But we don't always believe it! We don't always believe it's true; we don't always acknowledge it; and we don't always use it.

So do you believe that you have spiritual greatness and genius in you? Do you believe that you are a spiritual powerhouse? Because it is the truth! But sometimes deep down we don't always believe it about ourselves.

Einstein once said this:

"Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by how it climbs a tree, it'll live its whole life thinking that it's inferior or that it's stupid."

We have this greatness in us, but sometimes we judge ourselves that our talents aren't good enough. Sometimes we judge other people, as well. One of the worst things we can do is to compare ourselves to other people, because we end up diminishing and devaluing our greatness, our beauty and our talent ... sometimes to the point that we don't acknowledge or think that it's real or true, and we don't end up using it to the point that we feel a little helpless and a little hopeless and a little powerless in our lives.

Neale Donald Walsch said:

"The worst thought you could ever think -- the worst thought you could ever think in your life -- is to believe that you don't have the power in you to change or improve your life. Because it's just not true."

Every one of us has the power of God within us. And, as I mentioned earlier, we have access to incredible creative abilities, like the power of our words and our thoughts; our intuition; our imagination; our creativity; our passion. We have so much, but we sometimes don't always believe that greatness is in us.

Jesus said we shall do the things that he has done and even greater things than these. That's how much power is within us! And a part of our work here is to discover and to own and embrace and fully express the incredible genius and brilliance and goodness of God that is within every one of us.

So question: what is your greatest God-given gift? In what area do you excel at a level of genius and greatness that you maybe haven't owned or acknowledged or utilized yet?

Sometimes we can feel uncomfortable thinking we're magnificent; thinking that we're great; that we're spiritual powerhouses. Sometimes we feel more comfortable feeling incapable than feeling brilliant. Sometimes we are more comfortable feeling more passive than powerful. Sometimes we feel more comfortable feeling average than amazing.

"I am a powerful spiritual being."

Together: [with congregation] *"I am a powerful spiritual being."*

"I am endowed with amazing spiritual gifts."

Together: [with congregation] *"I am endowed with amazing spiritual gifts."*

So the first lesson in this is to own our spiritual gifts; to own our spiritual magnificence.

And the second one is to **BE AWARE OF THE AREAS OF WEAKNESS WHERE WE SOMETIMES WASTE AND MISUSE OUR SPIRITUAL POWER AND TALENTS.** As powerful as Samson was, he had a lot of weaknesses. The main one was "Philistine women," which really represents things that distract us; things that make us lose our focus. You know, the things that drain our energy. And the most important thing for us -- because it pulls us away from our destiny and our higher calling and our greater purpose. And the most important thing for us to do is to be aware of those areas where we give away our power. To be aware of those areas where we kind of succumb to temptation.

And I'll tell you, awareness is the first step of change and transformation. Awareness is the first step if we want to improve. To lie, deny and pretend everything's cool -- that we don't have any weakness -- is not the path to higher levels of consciousness and transformation.

Sometimes we need to ask ourselves the question: So where in my life am I wasting or not using my spiritual gift? Where in my life am I giving my power away to other people? Either blaming them or the economy, or the government, and making excuses. Where in my life am I squandering my time and my

energy and my efforts? Or what negative patterns do I keep repeating in my life? In my relationships or my finances or my health?

I knew a guy, Michael Rice, who wrote a book called *Why Is This Happening to Me Again?* Because sometimes we don't acknowledge what those weaknesses and challenges are; we kind of sweep them under the rug. But they keep repeating themselves.

And so until we become aware of these things, we will drain our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual power. And we've just got to be aware of those areas where we're living our best and actually draining and undermining our own success and happiness.

So yesterday my electricity – and, therefore, my air conditioner -- went off for four hours. [Congregation groans] Unexpected sauna I had yesterday! So I talked to the guy; I was so thankful he was able to come and fix it. And I said, "Roger, how do you work in this hot temperature all the time?"

He said, "Well, I just accept it and allow it. And I just find myself able to do it." And he said, "However, for years I would whine and complain about how hot it is. 'Oh, God; I've got to work in this heat! This heat is horrible; it's killing me.'" And he said, "Then I noticed that it was draining me more complaining than the heat was draining me."

That make sense, everybody? It is those things that we do to ourselves that we need to see and find, because they're draining our spiritual power from us. We think it's just nice conversation: "Oh; it's hot! It's hot!" But that is the type of thing that kind of drains our energy.

In the same way we have to acknowledge and accept our greatness, we have to acknowledge and accept that there are some areas in our lives that need some work. That sometimes our smaller self -- our ego self -- is pulling us in directions that really don't serve our highest and our best. And we need to pay attention to "the Delilah effects" that are kind of seducing and pulling us into things like gossip. Or overeating. Or whatever it is that we know is not for our highest and our best.

See the struggle here is to live a spiritually-centered disciplined life vs. an undisciplined, ego-driven life. And we can never elevate the level of our spiritual nature unless we own and acknowledge and are aware of the areas that are ego-driven and unhealthy.

And so these weaknesses do not have to take us down. They can help lift us up, but it begins with being aware; being honest; paying attention and noticing them so we can bring more light to them so we can be elevated by them.

And the final thing we learn from Samson and Delilah's story **is THE IMPORTANCE OF RECLAIMING OUR POWER.** That even when we've lost it and make mistakes, we can still come back and reclaim, refocus and recenter ourselves.

So Samson -- when he was captured -- they tied up his body, so they took away his will. They shaved his head, so he lost his power. And then they gouged out his eyes, so his lost his spiritual perception. But even at this lowest of low, where he thought everything was gone ... Even at that lowest of lows, he did three things.

Number one: He was aware that it was his mistakes and his actions and his choices that brought him there.

Secondly: He still had the intention and desire that God had for him, which was to help rescue the children of Israel from the Philistines.

And the third: He reached out to God to seek strength; to seek guidance; to seek an answer.

In the Book of James, it says:

"If you are lacking in anything, ask God, who gives generously without finding fault, and he will give it to you."

That if you are lacking in wisdom or if you are lacking in guidance or strength or peace or clarity, ask God! And then the way the story goes is that he prayed for this strength so sincerely that he could bring down the pillars of the temple of the Philistines, which represents all those false beliefs that we hold on to. All those negative mindsets. He wanted to bring them down to raise up the higher level of truth and spirit. And he even said, *"Let me die with those."* He had to die to his old self to fully purify and be freed from those limiting beliefs and those weak areas where we tend to give our power and our energy away.

You can look at this story as a cautionary tale of a "how not to," but I really believe there's a powerful message of inspiration and overcoming. That even when we make mistakes, and even when we are seduced into negativity, we can still rise to our highest potential and possibilities. But we need to trust God and turn to God in all things.

Remember last week I told you the overall theme of the entire Old Testament was one line? Listen to God and things will go well; don't listen to God and things won't go so well. And this story is an exact story of that. How much are you relying on God? How much are you leaning into God? Especially when things aren't going well, but also when they are going well! When you do have your power, still rely on God so that you're using it at the highest and most effective level.

So the three things are to:

- 1) Own your God-given gifts. You've got power in you! Recognize it and own it.
- 2) Be aware of your areas of weakness and those patterns. Because unless we are aware, we're never going to be able to transcend them.
- 3) And finally, reclaim your power. No matter how low you might go, God's always there, just waiting for us to open ourselves to be lifted and transformed.

And so regaining our spiritual power is what the message is from the story of Samson and Delilah.

God bless!

[Congregants applaud]

Copyright 2023 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Maraj