

Intro: Garrison. Pastor. Judges 13. **Pray.**

Thanos. Sauron. Emperor Palpatine. Regina George. Lord Voldemort. Yes I said his name. Villains. The bad guys. Some of the best! But do you know what they all had in common? They all lose for the same exact reason.

Think about it. Why's Thanos lose? Why does Voldemort lose? Fill in the blank with whatever antagonist you can think of for the most part.

They all lose in the end because of their pride. Their pride blinds them and inflates their ego such that the hero is able to beat them against all odds. And by the way, this is like every bad guy in fiction. This type of story has been told extensively.

It's the story of what happens to the prideful. And we all know how it ends. The prideful fall. They get humbled. And as the consumer, rooting for the hero to win, we celebrate when the villain's pride leads to their downfall right? Yes!! Haha you missed it. Take that Tom Riddle. We even relish it. Like we can't wait to see how badly they are humbled and lose.

Which puts us in an interesting place. Because in the real world, pride isn't something that is reserved to the bad guys.

Pride, at a base level, is an overinflated opinion of the self. And this leads to all sorts of problems.

According to the Scriptures, pride is an epidemic. Because as sinful people living in a sinful broken world, we're going to sin. And people we care about will sin. At the core of our sin, is rebellion against God. So you could say, at the core of our sin, is pride. Arrogance. I can do this or that without God. I want this or that over God. That's pride. In fact, pride in and of itself, is our attempt to be God. To replace Him with yourself.

So then the question then becomes, how does God treat the prideful? Does he treat them like we treat our villains? Gloating over them. Smugly waiting for their downfall.

Now even as I ask the question, if you know your Bible, you might have the answer, well I'm pretty sure God has some problems with pride. And you'd be correct. We see it clearly put in the book of James as well as many other places:

Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6

In the book of Proverbs we see a list of things that God hates. Very strong wording, and 'haughty eyes', or looking down at others. Thinking of yourself as better. It is described as one of the 7 things God hates. God hates pride.

Which is what makes the story we're going to look at this morning so interesting. Very clearly across the Scriptures pride and arrogance is something that sets people up as opposed to God. God's enemies. Yet in this story we're going to see that there's another layer to it. And I think it is a really fascinating picture of God's character. We'll see that:

God seeks the prideful.

So look with me to Judges 13. We've got a couple of chapters to get through as we see this story unfold. Before we get there, let me give you some context for the book of Judges.

As a quick recap. The Israelites are led out of slavery by Moses. They wander in the desert for 40 years. Moses is gone. Joshua succeeds him. And leads them into the Promised Land where God tells them to settle, but first he gives a command to clear the land of the inhabitants. One of the first battles is what we talked about last week. Jericho. Rahab helping the Israelites take the city.

They go on to fight for the next 10-20 years and are ready to settle into the Promised Land. But there's a problem. The Israelites only sort of drive out the Canaanites. They don't finish the job. They compromise. The tribes of Israel scatter to their own parts of the Promised Land to settle and immediately adopt the practices of the Canaanites. Worshiping idols. Child sacrifices. Sexual immorality.

And this sets the course for the book of Judges. Throughout the book you see this ongoing cycle of the Israelites sinning against God, God lets them be conquered, they acknowledge their sin, God raises up a leader, a judge in this period, to bring them out of oppression. Then there's a time of peace, before Israel sins again and the process starts all over.

Big picture, the book of Judges can be summed up in one verse that gets used a lot, and we'll see it highlighted in Samson's life too:

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Judges 17:6

At this time, the people did what was right in their own eyes. Not God's. And that always sets people up for failure.

Lets hop in. Judges 13.

13 And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

As the stage is setting for Samson, we see that the Israelites are playing out that cycle again. Rebelled, and God gives them over to the Philistines, a nation who inhabited the Promised Land as well.

2 There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. 3 And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, 5 for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

Samson is unique. He's called to be a Nazirite. A nazirite was someone who had taken a vow before God. To be consecrated and set apart to Him. They aren't allowed to cut their hair, drink alcohol, or touch anything dead.

He's born miraculously but he's also going to be set apart for God's purposes.

24 And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. 1 Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." 3 But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

Right from the start what you have to see is that although Samson gets this sort of 'red carpet' type introduction, there's something sort of off with him.

I mean look at how he's talking to his parents. He's blunt and coarse. He shrugs off their advice even though it's correct and reasonable. All they say is 'Hey Samson, remember you're a Nazirite, supposed to be really committed to God remember? And one of the things He told us not to do is marry a Philistine.'

And what does he say? It's right in my own eyes. This is the key phrase that is both a marker of the Israelites in this time, but also of Samson's whole life. And it is a dead giveaway for his pride. I know best. I don't need your opinion. I'm going to do what I want. I don't care what God thinks either.

And that posture is going to set the course for Samson's story in the next few chapters.

- After shrugging off his parents, he heads down to find the woman with his parents. On the way, he rips a lion in half with his bare hands. Which is cool, but it's also problematic because Samson is a Nazirite. He's not allowed to touch dead things. He has to hide his actions from his parents.
- Then he returns to marry the woman and sees the dead lion now has a beehive inside of it. So he again, goes and touches the dead lion to get some honey.
- At his wedding he bets all of his wife's Philistine countrymen a closet full of clothes if they can guess a riddle. The riddle is this weird wordplay on what's strong and sweet at the same time. TO the reader it's a boastful admission by Samson of what's he done. The strong is the lion. The sweet is the honey. He's bragging he got honey out of a dead lion. That he's broken the rules. Touched something dead.
- The Philistines beg his new wife to get the answer. She does and they guess his riddle. He gets so mad he kills all of them. All 30, over this riddle. And then storms off. His new father in law is a little freaked out, so he gives Samson's new wife away to the best man.
- Samson finds out and goes crazy. He grabs a bunch of foxes, ties them up from tail to tail and puts a torch between them and releases them in this massive Philistine farm. Which results in the Philistines coming and burning his now ex wife and father in law to death.
- The Israelites show up and are like, dude, what are you doing?? These guys rule over us. You're messing up our nation. So Samson lets them bind him and hand him over to the Philistines. But to him, it's a joke. Because he immediately breaks the ties and kills 1000 Philistines with a donkey's jawbone.
- Chapter 16 starts with Samson sleeping with a Philistine prostitute. The guy has a real problem with the ladies. And then in the middle of the night some Canaanites try to ambush him. But he outmaneuvers them and also demolishes this city's gate. He rips off the hinges, which would have left this entire town vulnerable to its enemies.

Which brings us to the turning point in Samson's story. All of that to some degree may sound kind of awesome. Up to this point we've seen Samson's great strength and ability. He's blessed and been given strength by God. He's been able to conquer and withstand the Philistines supremely.

But we also see he's got some major issues. And they all stem from the fact that he thinks he's right in his own eyes.. He does whatever is right in his own eyes.

- He goes after a Philistine woman, clearly wrong in God's eyes, because it's right in his own eyes.
- He's given strength by God. But uses it to kill a lion and then touches it. Breaking his vow to God. BC it's right in his own eyes.

- He's angry, aggressive and violent, because it seems right in his own eyes.
- He doesn't care about the consequences. Losing a wife. Causing that wife and her father to be burned alive. He's right in his own eyes
- He doesn't care about sleeping with a Philistine prostitute. He's right in his own eyes.
- He doesn't think about the fact that he's actually risked his own life many times in doing all of these things. Because he's powerful and invincible—and he takes the credit for that because he's right in his own eyes.

And this is all about to catch up to him. Verse 4:

4 After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver." 6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

Yet another woman who he should not be with. Another woman of the Philistines. And right from the beginning, Delilah is on their payroll. The Philistines are sick of this guy. He's basically untouchable because of his strength. So they ask Delilah to do a little homework for them. So she straight up asks him. Hey honey, how are you so strong and umm hypothetically how could you be tied up and subdued? Little weird. But Samson just rolls with it.

Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." 8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

Samson lies. Which is interesting because he obviously knows she's got malicious intent. And shockingly, after he tells her, he goes to sleep and she ties him up and wakes him to an ambush. He just breaks out easily, like it's nothing.

So Samson dumps her. Just kidding. He doesn't. And this happens TWO more times. Delilah comes back, whines, begging for him to tell. He lies. She ties him up and wakes him to ambush. He thwarts it. Three times! But it's kind of like he's into it. Like he's playing games with her. Literally playing with fire because he thinks he's invincible.

Finally she pulls out the big guns. She says if you really love me, you'd tell me. And he does! He tells her about his Nazarite vow and that he's never cut his hair. If it's shaved, he'll lose his strength. And finally Samson is about to get burned:

8 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. 19 She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. 20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. 21 And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

He sleeps in her lap. And she cuts his hair off. And for the 4th time he wakes to ambush. And he thinks 'I'm good, I'll just do what I've done every time'. But he did not know that the Lord had left him. It's all finally caught up to him. God's presence has been driven off and the Philistines finally get him. And it's bad. They gouge out his eyes, put him in shackles and throw him in prison.

Now I don't know about you but when I read this story I'm fairly baffled. Like it's actually confusing what's going on with Samson. Like how is he so blind? Is there something we're missing in the story? Some cultural context? A detail missing? But no it's all there.

Samson believes he is right in his own eyes and it all catches up with him.

Samson was living in a negative feedback loop. He misinterpreted the outcome of his actions as affirmation of his view of himself and his life. He's doing what seems right to him and nothing bad is happening, in fact, it's turning out pretty good, so that must mean he's pretty great right? No. And ironically, those prideful eyes are gouged out by Philistines. Samson is no longer right in his own eyes, because his eyes have been taken from him.

So here's what I'll say. No one in here has the strength of Samson, don't care how much you've been bulking. We may not be tearing lions in half or striking down an evil nation with a donkey's jawbone. But we do all have this same issue.

We all do what Samson does. We all have overinflated opinions of ourselves. It's about me. That's what pride is. That's what it means to do what is right in your own eyes. It's about me. It should be about me! And if you don't see it, just think about it and you will:

- When was the last time you were cut off in traffic and thought, hmm that person must have a lot going on today to be in such a rush. Or did you tell them off behind the safety of your car windows?
- When was the last time you were out at a restaurant and the waiter was taking forever or got your order wrong and you thought, dang I bet it is so stressful to have to be taking care of that many people. Or did you treat them terribly when they came back to your table?
- When was the last time you were given feedback about your weaknesses. Maybe some criticism. And you just thought, thank you. You are helping me grow. And I know it's hard to be honest with people, so thank you. Or did you get defensive? Justify? Say i'm already doing enough!
- How about at group when someone pressed into your sin? Do you thank them or just get annoyed and think about how bad their word delivery was? Or think they just must not understand me or my situation.
- This one is real for me— When was the last time something bad happened, job loss, fridge breaks, your kid or pet has some random hospital bill and you thought, I need to pray about this right now—instead of running to the computer to try to redo the budget. Or do you think, why am I having to deal with this? I don't deserve this to happen.
- How'd you handle the last fight with your spouse? Did you say, I'm going to forgive. Yep you were wrong, but I probably was too, so lets forgive and keep going. Or did you give them the silent treatment to show them how wrong they were. Make them hurt as much as they hurt you?
- Lets go spiritual. How'd you handle the last time the Bible said something you disagree with? Here's an example. Jesus said, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Pretty clear warning to not be greedy or desire money. But we sort of think, well Jesus follows up to that by saying whats impossible with man is possible with God, so I can lay down my life at the altar of money bc God will save me anyway. Or what about where Jesus says do not worry about your needs. What you eat or wear? Seek the

Kingdom first. Well I live in Charlotte. This economy! Surely Jesus didn't know what inflation would have done over the last couple years. This is greed. Love of money. Justified as security and stability. And we have no desire to repent of it bc we think we're right in our own eyes.

So sure, we're not Samson, but we are prideful. That's all pride. And I could go on and on.

And maybe right now you don't feel the weight of that right now, maybe because like Samson, you've not negative feedback loops too. Your social media page, your friends, what you read, watch and digest—might affirm that you're justified. But you're not. And I don't think we should miss where pride ultimately leads.

In Samson's case, it leads him to a jail cell. All alone, no sight— a shell of his former self. And as bad as the physical punishment is, the worst part by far is that realization he has.--->

That the Lord has left him. God removes hand of blessing on Samsons life. Samson wanted to do life without God, and God says okay.

Yet here is where I think the story get's pretty fascinating. Samson has been completely humbled. Everything has been taken away—even the presence of the Lord. And this is the point where God steps in to his life:

22 But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

We have this grim picture of Samson, in a dark prison, shackled, eyes gone, hair shaved. He's fallen far. But now what has been taken away is being returned. See it was never about the hair. It was about God's presence and favor in his life. And as his hair begins to grow again, God's presence returns to Samson.

God seeks Samson at his lowest point. God is seeking out the Prideful.

Now we may think, if God wanted to seek out Samson, why'd it have to be this bad? Couldn't he have sought him out before he lost so much? Well we have to remember, God hates pride. God opposes them. But He still seeks.

The reality is God often seeks the prideful is by breaking them. And even though we don't like the sound of that, it's actually what we need.

- And this isn't just limited to this story. Think about Paul. God blinds him for 3 days. Breaks him.
- Peter denies Jesus. So Jesus humbles him by asking him over and over if he loves him.

God hates pride. But He loves His people. And pride kills us. And He is committed to saving us from pride.

No matter how dear you are to God, if pride is harbored in your spirit, He will whip it out of you. They that go up in their own estimation must come down again by His discipline. Spurgeon

Which is why it gets to the point it does.

The reason it is so bad for Samson is because of how bad it's gotten in Samson. His heart is bent away from God. He wants to be God in his own life. So God breaks him. He does for Samson's good. So that Samson could actually repent of his pride and turn to God.

God had to let Samson fall, in order to actually use Samson. And He will do the same to us.

28 Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." 29 And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. 30 And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. 31 Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

God returns Samson's strength and he uses it to destroy thousands of the Philistines. And although Samson did not completely free the Israelites from the Philistines, he begins the process that will eventually be completed in the first chapters of 1 Samuel.

A couple things I just want to acknowledge. 1. Samson's death does come off as suicidal. This is not an affirmation of taking your own life. We're going to talk more about that next week in God seeking the downcast but I just felt like we needed to acknowledge that. 2. Honestly it's hard to tell if Samson is truly repentant. He certainly has been humbled. But it's hard to tell if it's taken because what he's asking is for is vengeance for his eyes.

But we do see that God is showing up in His life until the very end. Pursuing him, seeming to restore him and using him to accomplish His purposes. Scholars differ on the take. But I think what we can see here is God is coming after the prideful. He desires their hearts. He's humbling them for their good. And using sinful people for His glory.

I mean Samson makes it into the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. A list of some of the most faithful people in all the Old Testament. So we can say to some degree that there is some redemption in Samson's story. And not bc of him, but bc of God.

Now I'm not sure where everyone is this morning. Maybe this morning you're sort of feeling like Samson for most of the story.

That may seem pretty hard to grasp too. Like no, I'm not feeling like I am the aggressive maniac we just read about. But you are living as if you're right in your own eyes. We could make a pretty compelling argument that the reason your spiritual disciplines are lacking is because of your pride.

- Why seek God if I'm right in my own eyes?
- Why pray? I'm right in my own eyes
- Why read His word?
- Why go to CG or worship?
- Why listen to anyone in your community?

The most dangerous thing about pride is it's the cause for our lack of desire for God to seek us. Like each week we're talking about God seeking the broken, the runaway. And it doesn't hit as all. That's because of pride.

I'll just say this. God is coming after you. And that's a good thing and a hard thing. Because He may have to break you of some things.

Which is many of our stories. We hear it all the time. Before Jesus I thought I was great. Good job. Good house. Good health. But then this happened. And I saw my need. And God saved me.

Now that's not the only reason health issues or difficulties happen. But God is coming after you, pride included.

Maybe you're feeling more like Samson in prison. You've been humbled. You feel the weight of your sin. You see how pride has messed you up. God is seeking you too.

Wherever you are, God is seeking you.

And we know that because of Samson's story, but really because of what Samson's story points us to.

Samson was conceived miraculously. Samson was born to begin the deliverance of God's people. Samson is given over to his enemies who torture and wound him. Samson dies with his arms stretched out being mocked by his enemies to bring victory to God's people.

Sound familiar? In the Gospel Jesus' story plays out similarly but how much greater is our savior?

Whereas Samson's life was marked by external holiness, Jesus lived a truly holy life. Samson died pleading for vengeance against his enemies. Jesus died pleading for forgiveness of His enemies. Samson dies to kill his enemies. Jesus dies to save His enemies.

Samson was crushed because of his pride. Jesus was crushed so that you could surrender your pride to Jesus.

Samson died a prideful man. Jesus died to redeem prideful people. And that's why the Gospel is the cure for pride. Because it's humbling. And in order to accept it, you have to be humble.

Because you could not and cannot save yourself. You cannot clean yourself up. You can't sanctify yourself. You can try, but you'll be in the words of Jesus to Pharisees, like white washed tombs. You're dead. It doesn't matter how you look on the outside. You're dead in your sin and must be made alive by God. That's the humbling truth of the Gospel.

And the amazing reality of the Gospel is that Jesus didn't die for humble people. He died to make humble people. He died for prideful people like all of us to save us from our sin and pride.

Jesus has sought and is seeking you out in your pride to save you from yourself.

Will we be humble enough to let Him?

End with practice—fasting. You don't become less prideful by trying really really hard to be humble. You fight pride by practicing things that make you humble. Nothing will humble you quicker than seeing how needy you become when you miss one meal.

Pray.

Judges 13-15

Book of Judges—violent and disturbing. Israel's moral failure as they become like the Canaanites (they fail to drive them out as God commands them)

Judges are like chieftains over the tribes. Warlords almost. Not like a modern judge.

God calls the people to call Canaanites out of the promised land. They fail to do so. Move in along them and adopt their ways. Child sacrifices etc. Judges 2 highlights a cycle. Israel sins. They conquered. They pray for help. God raises up a savior, a judge usually, conquers the enemy and brings peace. Then Israel sins and the whole thing goes again.

Philistines are conquering them. Angel appears. DONT CUT HIS HAIR.

Judges get worse over time. Samson is the worst.

Key thing with OT and especially judges. Just bc they're prominent characters are even empowered by God, doesn't mean God affirms what they do.

In those days Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Hope of judges is that line. 'No king'. A king is coming. AND for Israel it's Saul then David. But ultimately what we'll then see is it's not an earthly king we need. But the King of Heaven and earth.