

COMPROMISED POTENTIAL

Judges 16:4-6, 13-20

I have often heard that we as individuals use only a small portion of the mental capability we have. If this is true, then we might wonder how much could be accomplished if we dropped the pursuit of trivial and non productive things and focused on being productive. So many people have considerable ability and they squander that potential by failing to make good choices of what to do with their ability and time. Too often we choose what is entertaining or what feels good and not what is productive.

We can learn from history as we study a variety of people who were given opportunities to serve as judges in the early days of the nation of Israel. Some had great leadership ability, others were reluctant leaders and some failed to safeguard the ability God had given them and followed foolish temporary pleasures that ensnared them and diminished their influence. Samson was an example of someone who was set apart for greatness from the time of his birth but was tripped up and undone by uncontrolled passions.

Israel had been going through the cycles of sin and deliverance by God Who raised up various people who served as judges. After the death of Abimelech who tried to make himself the king, there was a succession of six judges who were not very remarkable in what they accomplished and Israel continued to be oppressed by the Philistines. Apparently, it was difficult to find a good leader among the people, so, God intervened by causing a barren woman to conceive and raise up a child who would have special ability that God could use to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines.

We are familiar with the story of birth of Samson and that he was to be set apart from birth for the work God had for him to do. As he grew older, we are told that the Lord began to work within Samson. However, as he grew he also was attracted to a Philistine girl and pursued that fantasy with the reluctant help of his father who thought that Samson should find a wife among the young women of Israel. While the route his father advocated would have been generally the path that was in keeping with the principle of not intermarrying with the heathen, this was a special situation in that God was putting Samson into a position that would bring him into confrontation with the Philistines.

We know from the accounts in Judges that Samson did cause a lot of problems for the Philistines. They tried to stop him but he always proved to be too strong for them because the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him so that he did great feats. Samson's strength was recognized for being unnatural or, more properly, supernatural. The Philistines thought that his strength was "magical" or could be attributed to some superstitious routine or ritual or object he carried. If that were the case, then they thought that they might be able to remove whatever was giving him strength and rid themselves of all the problems he was causing them.

In spite of Samson's great strength, he had a significant weakness and that was his inability to control his attraction to beautiful women. The Philistines recognized this and they used this weakness to eliminate his influence.

Have you noticed how little human nature has changed over the course of time? In the political realm, whenever a person of ability comes on the scene, then those who are opposed to his ideas will try to find some weakness in his life so as to discredit him and eliminate his influence. Such tactics seem to work very well especially if the methods the person uses are unconventional. In the case of Samson we see a very unconventional if not unique person. In the *New Bible Commentary* (edited by Don Carson) the writer notes regarding the things

Samson did that in those incidences “Samson did not act rationally and purposefully, yet these acts resulted (eventually if not at once) in humiliating defeat for the Philistines. It is clear, therefore, that although Samson appeared to be out of control, the Lord was still using him to achieve his purposes.”

Please Tell Me – 16:4-6

⁴ After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Entice him, and see where his great strength *lies* and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver.” ⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you.” Judges 16:4-6 (NASB95)

Verse four starts out with “after this” and is a reference to Samson visiting a harlot and the Philistines waiting to attack him and kill him the next morning. However, he woke up at midnight and removed the gates and posts of the wall around the city and carried them to the top of a nearby hill. Once again he humiliated the Philistines.

If we engage in sinful practices, then we put ourselves in danger from the enemy of our souls. Our deliverance from such is found if we realize the sinfulness of the situation (Samson got up in the middle of the night) and flee from it. Such repentance allows God to intervene on our behalf. In Samson’s case he was strengthened to be able to remove the gates and posts of the walled city. When we are confronted with temptations, we would do well to remember the words of Paul in 1 Cor 10:13: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

The lure of the world is always with us. In some cases the attractions appeal to our shallow interests or baser drives. For example, we may be attracted to a shiny new sports car and would like to have that. However, this attraction is not based on a deep-seated passionate drive in our lives. Consequently, we will resist the temptation to spend the money or (in the case of some) to steal the car. In other cases, the attractions appeal to more noble and even altruistic motives. For example a mother may find herself in a situation where she cannot find a job to provide money to feed her children. She may then resort to shoplifting or selling illegal drugs to support her family. The temptation to do something wrong is much more difficult to overcome when the passions behind the actions are deep-seated. Samson’s encounter with the harlot was a shallow relationship and he was able to escape from the trap the Philistines had laid for him. However, he was “in love” with Delilah and that would prove to be his undoing.

If You Love Me – 16:13-15

¹³ Then Delilah said to Samson, “Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web [and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man.” ¹⁴ So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web]. And she fastened *it* with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web. ¹⁵ Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.” Judges 16:13-15 (NASB95)

Samson may have been in love with Delilah but she cared only for herself and the money she could make. In other words, she had her own personal agenda. There is a lesson here for the church. The church realizes that we have a responsibility to help others and it should be a passion for us to heal the sick, bring deliverance to the captives, clothe the naked, feed the hungry. On the other hand, the world system is interested in the church only to the extent to

know how to weaken and use it for their own purposes or agendas. Just as Delilah used Samson, the world will use the church to gain access to us and capture the church for its own purposes. We see such influence manifesting itself under the guise of “social justice.” It also shows up in “black liberation theology.” Their agendas are not related to the Kingdom of God but are primarily “political.” In the past, we have seen such error in the political activism of the National Council of Churches, the embracing of the politically correct agendas of various “moderate” (read that liberal) denominations. It is interesting that we don’t hear much about the National Council of Churches today. I’m not sure if it is because they have been discredited or have gone underground to avoid detection. Nevertheless, we can see evidence of their activities in churches (denominations) that ordain those involved in sexual perversion to positions of ministry. All these activities are lauded in the secular press. The true church must take a stand against ungodliness and when it does the secular press is quick to censure.

There are other lessons in the Scriptures that would teach us to stand firm on principles and to follow the commandments of the Lord even when our deepest passions would draw us away. I think that it was Adam’s love for Eve that caused him to sin when he participated in eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Was it David’s “love” for Bathsheba that caused him to commit adultery and murder? True love would have demanded that Adam rebuke Eve for tempting him and it would have demanded that David think of the consequences of following the temptation to sin with Bathsheba.

Don’t let your passion to “do the right thing” cause you to violate your covenant of grace with God. Samson’s love for Delilah caused him to drop his guard and violate adherence to his vow that was the basis of God’s Spirit empowering him.

An interesting observation from Barry Webb (*New Bible Commentary*) regarding the reckless behavior of Samson was that during all of his life he was told that he was special and gifted and set apart for the service of the Lord. His mother had been told to bring him up in a special way of being a Nazirite.

Samson was not ignorant of his calling. He had known all along that he was a Nazirite and that the secret of his strength lay in his special relationship with God (his hair was merely a sign of this). But he had never been able fully to come to terms with his separateness. He had always secretly wanted to be as other men and to enjoy the pleasures that they enjoyed (a temptation that is surely common to Christians today). In Delilah he saw a chance, perhaps his last chance, for the happiness he had always wanted. In giving in to her request, Samson virtually invited Delilah to release him from his Naziritship; to make him the ordinary man he had always wanted to be.

The Philistines Are Here – 16:16-20

¹⁶ It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. ¹⁷ So he told her all *that was* in his heart and said to her, “A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any *other* man.” ¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her all *that was* in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he has told me all *that is* in 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 called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. ²⁰ 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 departed from him. Judges 16:16-20 (NASB95)

The agents of the devil are persistent. Delilah tried on several different occasions to get Samson to tell her the source of his strength. He resisted, but she did not give up.

Several years ago we watched as the pro-liquor forces came with wave after wave of assault on the community to get package stores and then liquor by the drink approved. In many other areas of decency and morality we have sat by and allowed the enemies of the Kingdom of

God to capture the minds of our inheritance (our children). We had a national debate regarding the despicable idea of same gender marriages in our nation and then a ruling by the highest court of the government that it was legal. We have some states making laws that eliminate the distinction of “men” and “women” in restrooms that are accessible to the public. Little by little we are being changed and led away from the basic moral positions that are the bases of God’s blessing for any people. In some cases those who have sold out to the enemy have done so for money. In every case the church has been asleep and seemingly powerless to prevent the devastation from happening. Why was Samson powerless to prevent the Philistines from taking him captive? It was because the Spirit of the Lord had left him. Why is the church powerless to stop the onslaught of the secular humanist in taking over our nation?

Many of the problems that the people of God encounter can be traced back to the idea that many times people just want to “fit in” and be considered to be “normal.” Admittedly, there are some who really want to be “different” and many times these differences are exhibited or carried out by bad behavior. I used to tell my sons when they were growing up that it was OK to be different as long as that difference was being “better.” Unfortunately, the world takes note of those who are different by being prideful and boastful and typically ignores those who are humble and work behind the scenes.

To reinforce that the situation is real, I will quote from a Face Book post that I just saw that made the assertion “Boasting about oneself is sort of frowned upon in most Christian circles. We can help: 7 Easy Steps to Looking Humble While Bragging on Social Media.” (What followed was sarcasm about how people attempt to hide the fact that they are being boastful.)

The life of Samson could be viewed as somewhat of a parody on the history of Israel. They were set apart by God to be a special people for His purposes. As we know, they would brag about that relationship while at the same time trying to be like the rest of the world. We know what happened toward the end of the time of the Judges that the people were demanding a king so they could be like everybody else. We can see the same thing happening in the church – we are set apart by God to implement the kingdom of God in all the world and, instead, we wind up bringing the ways of the world and even the pagan idols and symbolisms into the church. It doesn’t stop there but works the same way in the life of most Christians. We have even heard some preachers tell us that it is prideful for us as Christians to think that we are any different from those who are lost. That’s an idea that is contrary to the admonition that tells us, “Be holy, because God is Holy.”

Compromised potential is something that all of us experience and it is something that we can overcome if we will allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may be changed into the image of Christ Jesus who is the express image of God. The way has been opened by an extremely high price that was paid on our behalf. Jesus became “sin” for us that we might become the “righteousness of God” in Him. Are we achieving our potential?