**The Costly Risk: The Tragedy of Samson's Ruin**

**Judges 16**

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March 26, 2017

Our Senior Pastor, Ritch will be back with us next week to take us digging into the mine of Romans to study the beautiful gems of God’s grace. But in preparation for that joy, our message today serves as the dark, felt backdrop upon which the brilliance of God’s salvation will be showcased. We’re in Judges chapter 16 and we conclude our three week study of the life of Samson, the last visible Judge, in a series of epic failures. In chapter 13 we beheld the prophecy of his rise. In chapters 14 and 15 we braced through the intensity of his rage. And now today, we beware the tragedy of his ruin. Judges chapter 16. We’ll read verses 1-4 and the rest we’ll cover in the message.

***1*** *Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.* ***2*** *The Gazites were told, “Samson has come here.” And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, “Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.”* ***3*** *But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.* ***4*** *After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.*

He was a decorated 4-star general who served in the U.S. Army for over 37 years. He graduated from West Point as a distinguished cadet in the top 5% of his class. He got married afterwards and later had two kids. In 1987 he earned his PhD in international affairs from Princeton. He led the military surge in Iraq and was a top commander in Afghanistan. One Admiral compared him to the likes of Ulysses Grant and Dwight Eisenhower as one of the great battle captains of American history. As the commander of the combined Arms Forces, he was over 17 schools and centers, officer training, and Army doctrinal manuals. At U.S. Central Command, he was responsible for operations in over 20 countries. He was known as "the world's leading expert in counter-insurgency warfare." In 2011, he was confirmed as the director of the CIA in the senate, unanimously—94 to 0. But less than 1 year later, he resigned because he had left a simple trail of emails revealing that he was having an affair. He had been married 38 years. His entire career was on the line. National secrets were at stake. Why would he take such a costly risk?

One person said, "Anybody with even the most minimal training in covering things up or keeping things secret would never have e-mails that can directly link back to you. Anybody who has a concern over being caught is going to take more caution in maintaining the secret." One person claims that this e-mail trail is proof of “a level of arrogance and a feeling that you're above the law." Another said, “Power and success give people a sense of invulnerability…" A professor said, "People tend to underestimate how quickly small risks mount up…because of repeated exposure to those risks…You do something once and you get away with it, but you keep doing them often enough, and eventually the risk gets pretty high."

It is a dark time in the land of Israel. They were chosen by God to conquer the land of Canaan. To eradicate the rampant idolatry, immorality, and brutality. But instead of bringing rest to the land through victory, they cave to the violence through surrender. As He promised, God brought foreign nations to discipline them and to ignite them into repentance, and to return to mission. But they settle into even deeper corruption, becoming the very thing they were sent to destroy. False gods are still worshiped through temple prostitution. Babies are still being sacrificed upon the fire. Women are abused. Yahweh is mocked. And Israel has finally given up the fight. They’re not calling out for help. Even though if they trusted God victory was guaranteed, they had come to a place of compromise. Without a king to lead them, Israel had become comfortable doing whatever was right in their own eyes. So God gave them Samson, who we soon discover is only too fitting for their times, because he, like his nation, seems plenty happy getting friendly with the enemy.

Tolerance. Isn’t that the word we hear so often? Can’t we all just get along? What’s the big deal? Humans by nature are driven toward happiness, but there is one fundamental question: who determines what brings the greatest happiness? Who gets to decide what makes me happy? The world will say, you do. Everyone gets to follow their own hearts to do what makes them happy, what is right in their own eyes. This is the culture unfolding before us. It is a world in which the only claim that cannot be tolerated is the message of Jesus and that true happiness can be enjoyed only when we do what is right in the eyes of God. The world will reject this message at great risk.

But through Christ, God has made a way of forgiveness. And the church is a place where sinners come to surrender to His rule and enjoy His salvation. But even as God’s people, our hearts are not so different. We’re tempted to take risks, to imperil God’s honor and find awe and enjoyment in idolatrous ways that He strongly warns against. And this chapter exists to remind us that no one takes God’s salvation lightly without consequence.

Salvation is God’s work. He is a God of wonders. And He performs His salvation with maneuvers you could never even imagine. But every once in a while, when His work is challenged over and over and over again, when the precise moment of justice is required, He has to bring the thunder. Because God suffers no scorn from arrogant challengers. After the mystery of His wonder, and the supremacy of His power, we now witness the jealousy of His honor. We’ve stepped back in awe. We’ve held on with trust. Now it’s time to sober up in fear and beware God’s thunder. Because His awesome hand of judgment falls upon those who, at the expense of His honor, decide to take risks. This chapter is proof that these risks are never worth the cost. There are three realities to beware.

**I. Beware his unrivaled power; God’s Might: A Risk Evaded (16:1-3)**

Beware the thunder of God’s unrivaled power or His strength which is displayed in verses 1-3 in what some people call “A Close Shave.” Samson takes a great risk and narrowly evades being captured. But in the process, God is going to display a supernatural might, a power unrivaled. That means it’s better than everyone or everything of that type. God’s power is unrivaled. Nothing can come close to matching it. Take a look at verses 1-3. A display of God’s might.

It’s a short story that kind of blows our minds. There’s very little detail. It raises a lot of questions and doesn’t give a lot of answers. But it proves God’s power. Here are three qualities of God’s power that are revealed here.

Quality # 1: God’s power is unrivaled in versatility: He can use anyone. (16:1)

Versatility means able to adapt. We tend to box God in and assume that He can only work through certain kinds of people, good people. But if that's the case, He wouldn’t have much to work with. In fact, He wouldn’t have anything to work with. So, He does and can use anyone and anything for His glory. He is unthreatened by the pride of sinners. He’s versatile. He proves this in verse 1. He can use a defiant renegade like Samson. Look at the extent of his pride.

***1*** *Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.*

This is the furthest place in enemy territory, Gaza. He’s not in some border town, anymore. He’s gone deep. What he was doing there, we don’t know, but from Israel’s perspective, he is as far downhill as he can get geographically and spiritually. And while there, he succumbs to his basest appetite. He has trouble with his eyes. He sees a prostitute, and when he sees something he wants, he gets it. He denies himself no pleasure. This is flagrant immorality. But his arrogance shows that in this spot in enemy territory, he thinks he has immortality. So he flaunts it and goes and makes the worst choice and enters in. Here’s a woman that like the rest in Samson’s story, we’re not given her name because that’s all women were in Samson’s life. They were just objects to him. This is the extent of his pride, the furthest place, the basest appetite, the worst choice. And yet God is about to use him. Even a man with pride like Samson, God is not threatened by his sin. He can use anyone. His power in unrivaled in versatility.

Quality # 2: God’s power is unrivaled in certainty: He fears no one (16:2)

He can use anyone, and He’s not afraid of anyone either. He fears no one. He is unthreatened by the pride of sinners and unafraid of the schemes of contenders. Apparently, committing arson and slaughtering 1000 Philistines amongst other crimes, violates county code and lands you on the Gaza’s Most Wanted list. Samson is a national target now with a price on his head. And so, the Gazites desire his death. And they gain some advantages here. There are three that we see. And yet, they fail to enjoy the benefit of them because of the certainty of God’s power. He always wins and He’s not afraid of them. Even though they have the advantage of an early edge.

***2*** *The Gazites were told, “Samson has come here.”*

This is inside intelligence which you kind of need when you’re fighting The Hulk. And they have a great strategy, a sneak attack.

*And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, “Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.”*

A surprise ambush. You need this when facing a supernatural warrior. And they have unified diligence here. They are all in. “Then we will kill him.” There is no negotiation, no talking. They’re just going to end it. It is a collective resolve. These are some good advantages, but they pose no threat to power that is supernatural. When God fights, the outcome is certain. He fears no one.

Quality # 3: God’s power is unrivaled in possibility: He can do anything (16:3)

He can do whatever He wants. He is unthreatened by the laws of nature. The enemies are waiting to pounce on Samson. Look what happens in verse 3.

***3*** *But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.*

Now it may be hard for us to imagine how amazing this is. But if you understand the physical dimensions of what this gate probably was, according to research done by one of my former professors, if this was like a gate of the area, a similar kind of that time, it was probably at least 10 feet tall, 10 feet wide, and close to 1 ½ feet thick. It was made of Cedar probably, and maybe even bronze plated. So these gates could have been at minimum, over 5,000 lbs. And the maximum is hard to estimate, but it could have been 5-10 tons if you include all the bronze plating and bars. The distance it was carried was from Gaza to Hebron is around 36 miles that he carried this. A Russian champion weightlifter set 80 world records. He could carry 550lbs 7 feet in 15 seconds. And here Samson caries over 10,000 lbs not just 7 feet, but 36 miles. And that’s all uphill, about 3200 feet change in elevation. It’s like being in East Peoria and the police are out there, maybe the chief and some officers. They are sleeping and are trying to catch you in the middle of the night. You pick up the chief’s car and another car, you throw them on your back, and you carry them all the way to Bloomington. And you put them on the roof of city hall.

Imagine everyone waking up in the morning in Hebron Central Park, and they see this giant gate on the hill with the “City of Gaza” seal. Grandpa walks home and says, “Apparently, Samson had a run in with the Philistines and he brought home a souvenir.”

Grandma’s like, “What did he bring? How did the border patrol let him through?”

And he’s like, “No, that is what he brought back. The border.”

It’s no wonder that Samson acts like the rules don’t apply to him. The very laws of nature seem to bend to his will. God’s power is unrivaled in possibility. But before we move on, did you notice something was missing this time? In chapters 14 and 15 we saw how Yahweh’s Spirit rushed upon him. But here, there is no mention of that. It is clearly the power of God. It’s the only way to explain what is about to happen. But there is still an absence, a lack of mention of God here. And there’s a warning for us to consider. Just because God is allowing us to get away with sin while our lives seem great, it doesn’t mean he’s okay with it. Just like trials are no proof that God is displeased, earthly success is no guarantee that God regards us with favor. Sometimes we are testing His patience to the limit and setting ourselves up for a discipline of a far greater intensity in the future. And we remember the warning:

**1 Corinthians 10:12** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Samson gets desensitized to risk one time too many. This is the power of God, to be sure. It’s a message that the Philistines get loud and clear. That’s what explains the bizarre events that follow. This is unrivaled power. God suffers no scorn from arrogant challengers. No one is strong enough to fight Him.

What would we do if we possessed that kind of power? What would you and I do if we thought that we were invincible? We’d do whatever we wanted. You can already catch glimpses by what you do when you’re alone. What you do when you’re at school, or on the internet, or when your spouse is away, when we believe that we’re untouchable. The human heart is terrifying! But think about this. There actually was a man who was truly untouchable. He enjoyed unrivaled power over sickness, elements of nature, over death itself. His inheritance included the entire universe. And what did He do with all that power? Did He do anything from selfish ambition or conceit? Did He arrogantly consider others less significant than Himself? Did He look out to His own interests? What was His mindset?

**Philippians 2:6–8** who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is a man who John 5:19 says:

**John 5:19** So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

God’s will. This is a man who embodied meekness, strength under control. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon Him where did God send Him? Into the wilderness to be tempted. And while there, He refused to abuse not even one super-joule of power. Not even to make a mini-muffin after 40 days of fasting. This is true strength. It is the ability to resist temptation. It is the ability to do the father’s will and stay on the cross even when He had the power to come down and everyone was telling Him to. He was resolved to do God’s will. It is in the Gospel that God showcases the greatest versatility and certainty and impossibility. And then we’re going to use all that to enable our own sin? It’s time for us to sober up. This is the kind of strength that we lack, like Samson. It reminds us of Proverbs 25:28.

**Proverbs 25:28** A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

We would do well to remember Galatians 6:7.

**Galatians 6:7** Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

We need to check our hearts, especially when we have power, authority, and strength. Because we need to cultivate a sense of reliance. Never underestimate God’s ability and how He works. He can use our secret pleasures as the very instrument of our downfall. So we beware the thunder of His unrivaled power.

**II. Beware His bitter punishment; God’s Discipline: A Risk Defied (16:4-22)**

God’s discipline is unleashed in verses 4 through 22 when Samson, at great risk, defies God’s honor. We realize that his pain in this punishment is exceedingly bitter. It is something that tastes offensive. It is flavors that are foul, winds that are intensely cold and biting, experiences that hurt, that are hard.

When you are a kid, one of the worst tasting things you ever have to experience or swallow is cough syrup. Your mom comes in with that and you just try to get it down. One of the worst-tasting popular medicines, reported so, is called Buckley’s. It tastes so bad, that the company’s slogan is, “It Taste’s Awful. And It Works.” It’s like it was written for moms and not for kids. Apparently, it is one of the worst flavors that money can buy. It claimed to have unique ingredients that work well to help address and relieve cough symptoms. But the result is this really bitter taste. I’m sure a lot of us can stomach cough syrup, and things far worse. But none of us is a match for the concoction that God creates to serve as punishment. Here are some ingredients that make our punishments exceedingly bitter.

Ingredient # 1: Responsibility: We’re the ones to blame (16:4)

Or better yet, culpability, meaning it’s our fault. It’s so hard because we realize that we’re the ones to blame. Look at verse 4.

***4*** *After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.*

We see that Samson loves a woman. There’s nothing wrong with that, but it’s more than that. And he doesn’t just see her this time. This is full on love. But here are two details about this woman. First, her location. She is in the Valley of Sorek. We are no longer in the hilltop of Hebron and home country. We’re in the Valley of Sorek, in the Philistine country, in the lowland of his foes, where danger lurks. And for the first time in this story, we’re given a woman’s name: Delilah. It’s a bit of a riddle. It’s very possible that her name means “flirtatious.” It’s hard to say. But here is a name, a person, a forbidden woman who will tease Samson to risk it all. And we’re reminded of the Proverbs that say

**Proverbs 5:3–5** For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol;

Samson loves her anyways. And so the punishment is going to be bitter because of his own responsibility in this sin.

Ingredient # 2: Disloyalty: We’re destroyed by the very thing we love (16:5-6)

Betrayal. It turns against us. The disloyalty of our secret sins give us up. There’s a crazy offer here.

***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.”*

With five major cities in Philistia, this is probably at least 5,500 pieces of silver. And in chapter 17, the next chapter over, a priest is given room and board with an annual salary of 10. So 5,500 is crazy money here. And you can imagine a poor servant on the side saying, “With that kind of cash, why don’t we just hire an army?” And everyone just kind of looks at him and shakes their head. And they say one word: Gaza! You can’t just take this guy out. We need a surprise attack. And so without any hesitation, Delilah gives up her relationship with Samson because of her hunger for luxury. And so in verse 6, there is an immediate attempt to deliver.

***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.”*

She’s disloyal. And it’s going to make it more bitter.

Ingredient # 3: Clarity: We should have seen it coming (16:7-19)

It’s so obvious and it makes it bitter. There are lots of dead giveaways here that show the clarity of Samson’s impending doom, that he ignores. You see the declaration and repetition of Delilah. Over and over she is clear. “How do I bind you to subdue you?” I mean 4 times! Over and over, “Samson, you are so strong. What’s your secret? How do I tie you up? You’re so strong.” You just see the hammer coming and the progression. Samson gets closer to the truth. From random cords and ropes then dangerously close, to weaving his hair. He’s playing with fire and he’s so flippant, toying around with her. Giving her absurd ideas. Joking around with a loaded gun. He should have been keyed off by the recollection that he should have. She uses the same tactic that had been done before by another woman used by his enemies, questioning his love. The dead giveaway here is Samson’s devotion. He gives in to her nagging and he makes a full commitment to idolatry and puts his relationship with Yahweh on the line for her to cut. It is so clear. We see her affection and how she asked him to fall asleep on her knees, in her lap, and made it so obvious. Let’s just watch this game of flirting with the enemy play out. There are four rounds. Round 1:

***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.”* ***7*** *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.*

Round 2:

***10*** *Then Delilah said to Samson, “Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound.”* ***11*** *And he said to her, “If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”* ***12*** *So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.*

Round 3:

***13*** *Then Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”* ***14*** *So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.*

Round 4. She breaks out her best move. “Your heart is not mine!” We’ve seen this before. She accuses him of lying, as if she’s been always honest. Idols will never settle for less than your full affection. You can’t serve both God and money, the Lord and lust. You have to choose! And as one preacher says, “Idols will always break your heart.” And here she is, demanding!

***15*** *And she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.”* ***16*** *And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.* ***17*** *And he told her all his heart, and said to her, “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man.”*

He puts his relationship with sin and pleasure before his relationship with God.

***18*** *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.*

The tables turn! Instead of the Philistines sleeping while Samson rips out their gates, Samson sleeps while the Philistine cuts off his locks. The moment they learn the truth, he loses it. It’s so painfully clear to us, and yet Samson doesn’t realize the sun has set.

Ingredient # 4: Subtlety: We’re always caught by surprise (16:20)

Somehow, we’re caught by surprise. We’re shocked because we pretend like we can get away with this! And we see Samson’s arrogance. He thinks it will be just like other times. And we see his ignorance. He doesn’t know that the Lord had 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.*

He didn’t know! Somehow the subtlety of sin brings a rude awakening. The enemies catch him. Yahweh left and he didn’t even notice. And here’s the sharp aftertaste of his punishment.

Ingredient # 5: Severity: It’s never worth the cost (16:21-22)

The intensity, the force of pain. We’re caught by surprise and the cost is never worth it. It’s always worse than we think. Look at verse 21.

***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.*

I see at least four losses. There’s loss of sight. His eyes are gouged out. Loss of his home. He’s brought deep into enemy territory back to Gaza. Loss of freedom. He’s bound with bronze shackles. And loss of dignity. He is sentenced to grind grain at the mill. This is a task for slaves, for donkeys and women in that time. They are looking down on him and here he is, grinding grain. It’s fitting since he destroyed their crops. Apparently, Dagon, the god of the grain, wins. Overnight this man has become the object of torment. But not all is lost.

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

“Began” is a key word. Just like Samson began to save Israel, his hair began to grow again. The story is not over. But here’s the point. God’s discipline hurts. His punishment is painful. He suffers no scorn from arrogant challengers and no one escapes His justice. We need to not miss that this story was written to be read to Israel. And Samson is a mirror. Future Israel had to hear this story because they had to understand that they had a need for Yahweh’s salvation. And that God had left and they never even realized it. Israel kept chasing other lovers, expecting to have God’s strength whenever they wanted. Just like Samson, the idolatry of His people left them spiritually blind to both His presence, and more terrifyingly, to His absence. God wants His people to read this story to see what happens when people who are sent to do His will by His power are enticed by a love of idols and end up humiliated. It is spiritual adultery.

It’s not just an Old Testament problem, is it? Paul says of these types of punishments in 1 Corinthians 10:

**1 Corinthians 10:6** Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

He’s thinking back on Exodus and the people who lusted after all of these things.

**1 Corinthians 10:7-14** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Look at the warning that James 4 makes against the church. He says:

**James 4:4-10** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

God is wanting to work and draw us to Himself. And this is a hard thing to grasp: God’s discipline. And so we have need of endurance. Hebrews 12 is a chapter that talks about Jesus as the forerunner of our faith and the object of our faith. He talks about us following and he says:

**Hebrews 12:5b-11** “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This is how God works. And to help us beware the thunder, later in that chapter he says:

**Hebrews 12:18-21** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

This is the thunder! And he says:

**Hebrews 12:22-29** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

You beware God’s thunder! How seriously does He take His justice? It is so serious that even when His own Son cried out “let the bitter cup of your wrath pass,” God said “drink it.” And He did! He drank it down to the bitter dregs. Not a drop of wrath is left for us to swallow. But as sons, we may yet taste the bitterness of His Fatherly discipline. So we sober up with fear. And we not only check our heart, we guard our hearts. We stop playing games and flirting with sin, asking for help while we’re chasing idolatry and on our way to Delilah’s house. We need to flee idolatry and stop believing we can indulge in sin without suffering discipline. Flirting never lasts forever. We beware His unrivaled power and His bitter punishment.

**III. Beware his fierce passion; God’s Glory: A Risk Elevated (16:23-31)**

Beware the thunder of His fierce passion. His passion is His glory. Nothing surpasses it. It is His most intense desire. It’s the end toward which everything drives. God’s glory! The Philistines assume they win and they celebrate Samson’s fall. And the risk is elevated even higher here because they directly challenge God’s glory that He will defend with a fierce passion. Fierce means intense, fervent, aggressive, relentless. This is the kind of passion that God has for His glory, His love.

Girls, imagine that it’s your wedding day. Things are going well. The ceremony has just finished. In a few hours you’ll enjoy a reception and then spend the rest of your life with your beloved husband. But before the reception, you have this time to take photographs. And so you go over to this nice park and get out in your flowing gown and there is this perfect spot beyond the bridge, under a tree, beside a bed of roses. The photographer gets you to lean together. And right before they take the picture, whoosh! This other woman just photobombs into your shot! What’s that all about? She does it again! And again! She jumps right in and is messing it up, trying to steal the moment. And all of a sudden she jumps in front of you and throws her arm around your husband! And you recognize her. This is his ex-girlfriend from high school. And she keeps jumping into the photos. And your husband is smiling for the camera as if nothing is wrong.

How do you respond? Do you just kind of laugh it off? “It’s not that big a deal. I don’t really like my hair today anyway. You can be in all of our photos and albums.” No, you would be insulted. You’d get fierce. You’d say, “Excuse me!? This is my husband! This is our wedding! You don’t get in between us! You don’t invade our intimacy! You don't challenge the glory of our love!” And what should your husband say? “Awww! Stop being so jealous!” No, a good husband is thankful that his wife demands his full heart. True passion, true love has a jealousy to it. It’s a sort of full affection that defends that affection with ferocity. Marriage is just a picture of God’s love that He enjoys in the trinity. And it’s a love that reveals His glory. And He has a passion for it. And He will protect it. And so there are some warnings against the thunder of this passion.

Warning # 1: It is jealous: God hates idolatry (16:23-26)

He is a jealous God. He is jealous for His glory. He hates idolatry. It threatens the beauty of His glory. And so the Philistines are an affront here in verses 23-26. Here’s this scene of mockery where the enemy frolics around in blasphemy. They ascribe this military victory to their lifeless idol, Dagon. And they’ve won not because Yahweh isn’t in control, but because He is. And they have the audacity to celebrate.

***23*** *Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.”* ***24*** *And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.”*

They’re not afraid of Israel or Yahweh! They’re just afraid of Samson.

***25*** *And when their hearts were merry, they said, “Call Samson, that he may entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars.* ***26*** *And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.”*

Here the Philistines are singing a song that Israel should have been singing. Instead, God’s enemies are making fun of Him and entertaining themselves with this trophy boy, Samson. He is so pathetic now that he needs the help of a boy to find a place to rest. Unless maybe something else is going on…

Warning # 2: It is zealous: God hates idolatry a lot (16:27)

God is zealous for His glory. He doesn’t just hate idolatry. He hates it, a lot!

***27*** *Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.*

This is a lot of people, and God is going to use them to prove the extent of His zeal. This is a very intense situation where He defends His glory. He is jealous! He is zealous for His glory.

Warning # 3: It is precious: God loves his glory (16:28-31)

This glory is so precious to Him. He loves His glory! He loves His honor. The beauty of the love that He enjoys. And the proof of His love is seen in His willingness to listen to Samson’s prayer, to defend His glory. This is a hard section to interpret. I don’t have all the answers here. There are a couple observations that are somewhat confusing.

***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.”*

Samson, even though all Israel is defeated and refuses to ask for help, he calls out to Yahweh. So he makes a respectful address here. He cries out! And his prayer seems to be a believing request. It seems positive, but then there’s still this hint of possible vengeful motivation. It’s still kind of a personal focus. It’s hard to say. It’s somewhat confusing. There’s a mixture here. But either way, God loves His glory and He’s so passionate in His willingness to listen to this response. And He answers Samson’s prayer and brings about a total devastation.

***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.*

It’s hard to know, was this an act of great faith, or an act of faith the size of a mustard seed? We don’t know. But the story ends on a minor note. It seems to be that Samson was more successful as a savior dead, than he was alive. He dies, perishes in a heap of rubble amidst the ruin and corpses of Philistines and a pagan temple. This is a costly finish to accomplish his mission, but to die. And yet, despite all of Samson’s shortcomings, God uses him anyway. Why? Because His glory is so precious. He will defend it with passion. There’s a sober conclusion in verse 31.

***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.*

He was a dark illustration of how adulterously blind Israel had become. It seems that he, like Israel, never really understood or embraced his role that he was given. He did not listen carefully to God’s word. But, he did rule for two decades. We don’t know much of what happens. We do know that Samson had faith, because he is listed in Hebrews 11 in the hall of faith, in verse 32.

**Hebrews 11:32** And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—

And his name is listed next to a few other men from Judges: Gideon the idolater, Barak the coward, Samson the womanizer, Jephthah the child sacrificer, David the adulterer and murderer. These are men who fell greatly, but were forgiven by God. No one is beyond God’s mercy if they call out in faith. Heaven is full not of perfect people. It’s full of epic failures, forgiven people. They’re not there because they deserve it, but because they don’t. It’s not because of perfection, but because of faith. They’re there because of Jesus.

Samson didn’t deliver the final strike, and neither would a future supposed savior named Saul, who would also take his own life in battle with the Philistines. It would take a future king David to deal death to them. But even then the war would continue to rage until the ultimate King would one day return to deliver the final head-crushing blow to the serpent. God’s passion for His glory is fierce. He suffers no scorn from arrogant challengers. No one steals His glory. No one gets in His way.

Jesus is no stranger to zeal. It is He that made a whip of cords and drove merchants from the temple. It is He who when Peter told Him to not go to the cross said, “Get behind me, Satan!” It was He, the angel of Yahweh, in Isaiah 37 who slayed 185,000 Assyrians in one night, because they insulted God among idols. This is Jesus in Revelation 19.

**Revelation 19:11-16** Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the One before whom we are told that every knee will bow in Philippians 2.

**Philippians 2:9-11** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

No one can steal His glory! And yet in Romans 8 we’re told that by faith, in this glory, we can share!

In John 17 He prayed

**John 17:20–24** “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

**Romans 8:16–18** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

We’ve been called through the good news of the Gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what lies ahead: our Savior. And so we check our hearts and we guard our hearts and we rend our hearts. We bend our knee in surrender to God and we think more severely about our idols. It’s time to break them, to smash them, to destroy the worship that goes on in our hearts, the thing that draws us into awe and reverence for things that God warns us against. How is God working in your life to sober you up in fear at the jealousy of His honor? This is our Savior. We beware the thunder of His unrivaled power, the thunder of His bitter punishment, the thunder of His fierce passion.

In our DVD collection at home, there is an old cardboard box, and in it lies a silver two-disc special Collector’s Edition devoted to one player’s feats in basketball. The contents are impressive. It is feature length films with his career and a comeback. Highlight reels with no-look assists, dunks, and buzzer-beaters. He is known by many as the greatest player of all time, and this DVD set is a testimony to honor his supremacy.

However, in recent years, a journalist wrote a story on this athlete. The article discussed many things, but there was a topic that haunted this man more than any other. It was the comparison between him and a younger NBA star who was more current. Whenever the question was brought up about whether this newcomer was better, the veteran would deny it. His responses were frustrated and flustered. He wouldn’t stand for any challenger to his supremacy. In security detail, you give codenames to people under your protection. Each person in this veteran’s bodyguard crew has codenames. This player chose his own codename. By what name do you think he wanted to be called? “Yahweh.” It’s a choice that seems to reveal a man desperately clinging to a glory that fades.

But there is only one true Yahweh, one God above all with glory unfading, with power unrivaled, with punishment unequal, with a passion unrelenting. There is only one man who didn’t fail and who will never fail, before whom all can be forgiven in faith. He is the radiance of the glory of God, the source of our salvation. He is a man of mystery worthy of all reverence and wonder. He is a man of supremacy, deserving of all confidence in his maneuvers. A man of jealousy, demanding all reliance and submission to his honor. He was before all, and is above all. He is a better Savior who not only begins to rescue, but ends the war. He is a God-man who can say, “It is finished.” And it is. And I believe that takes us back to Romans 8. Hear the declaration of God:

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

But remember the life of Samson. It is an epic failure to warn that God and His salvation are never taken lightly without consequence.