

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture: Judges 16:15-21

Sermon: *Caution! Danger Zone*

The conflict in the land of Israel is back in the news. You have been reading that part of the difficulty is in a part of that country called Gaza. Those of you who read the Bible understand that Gaza is the old Philistine Empire. About the time the Israelites came into their land there also was a group of people who came from the islands in the Mediterranean. They landed on the coast about the same time the Israelites came up from the south, and there has been conflict in that part of the world now for thousands of years.

The story I am reading for you today is the story of part of the life of Samson, who went down to the country of Gaza or the land of the Philistines. So it seems like the conflict continues on. Let me begin reading for you down in [Judges] chapter 16, verse 15. This is the story of Samson and Delilah--where Samson is tricked, and he reveals to Delilah the source of his strength, and then the difficulty that came to him. This is verse 15:

Then she said to him, *"How can you say, I love you, when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength."* With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.

So he told her everything. *"No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."*

When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he had told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. 19Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you." He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. 22But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

There is a famous phrase in the Christian community that describes many of us. It was coined by the Christian writer, Elton Trueblood. It is called "angelic fallacy." Dr. Trueblood said there are many individuals who think they are angels instead of humans, and as such, they expose themselves to situations they cannot handle. The most famous illustration of this in the Bible is Samson. Samson, you recall, was the Arnold Schwarzenegger of the Bible. He was the man who was recognized everywhere as the strongest man who ever lived, and yet he was the man whose life was ruined because he thought that because he was strong physically, he could be strong morally. There is a whole series of books that have been written now that are called Books for Dummies. There is Golf for Dummies and Computer for Dummies.... There ought to be a book called Morality for Dummies, and the person it ought to be written to is Samson.

He began to take his vacations down on the coast, but unfortunately, that was the enemy's territory. You recognize that some of the times that you get in the most trouble are the times when you are the most relaxed and you are taking it easy. He's down here on vacation. He sees this beautiful girl named Delilah. He begins to date her and falls in love with her. Now Delilah is one of those long stories in history where a woman is used by a government or some power to entrap a man and find out his secrets. So they paid her big bucks and said, "Find out how this man is so strong."

Well, he told her three different stories. Each time the Philistines showed up, they recognized that he was not telling the truth--he still was strong. When we come to the story now, Delilah is saying to him again, "If you love me,"--those famous words--"If you love me, then you will tell me what your secret is." Now you

almost want to say, "Samson, how many more times does she have to show you that she isn't interested in you? How many more times does she have to trick you?" But big old, good-hearted Samson--he went rushing into evil, thinking that he could keep on handling it. And his life was ruined.

I have entitled this sermon "Caution! Danger Ahead" because there are an awful lot of people--like Samson--who think that they can go on and do whatever they want. They are smart enough; they are strong enough; they have talent enough; they can manipulate enough. They can always work themselves out of any circumstance they are in, not recognizing that many times, the person who is the weakest is the one who thinks he is the strongest.

Now we need to be reminded that when God created the world, he created it with certain physical laws. You studied those in school. Laws simply mean that you cannot break them. You can try, but you will end up destroying yourself. What we forget is that God also created spiritual laws, and they are not open to my manipulation. They are not open to what I think. When I run into them, I am going to be destroyed. What the story of Samson is trying to tell you is that if you keep breaking the spiritual laws of God, then disaster waits at your doorstep.

Most of us forget part of what the Lord's Prayer is. *"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread; and lead us not into temptation."* What are we saying when we say this prayer is, "Lord, I am weak. Lord, I can't handle too much. Don't let me get in over my head." And the next phrase is, "Lord, keep me from the Evil One." What we do is that we laugh at evil. We dress up Satan as a cartoon figure. What we forget is that Jesus warned us "he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour," and when you fool around with him, he's always going to win. So because we have forgotten how to pray, we put ourselves in circumstances that get us in terrible, terrible trouble.

Let me give you some illustrations--I want you to listen carefully. Some people think that they can take just a dose of cocaine, and if they don't like it, it is O.K. What you don't understand is that most people who are cocaine addicts took one dose and could not stop. You are out on a date. You don't know who the girl is, and she doesn't know who you are, but you go to bed. Later, you find out you have AIDS, and in less than five years you are dead. You start watching pornography on the Internet. What many people do not recognize, but I want you to hear, is that 1 out of every 20 marriages in America that ends up in divorce because one partner or the other gets hooked on pornography on the Internet. "I can handle it"--and they do not recognize the difficulty that addictions can bring to people.

People come to me very often and say, "Pastor, tell me what you think about drinking." Let me tell you what I say to them. This morning there are ten million American adults who would give a right arm if they could stop drinking, and an additional five million go up and down this way because they recognize that they cannot handle it. So when somebody comes to me and says, "What do you think," I say, "let me show you how that works. I've got a pistol and it has 15 chambers in it. I put a bullet in one of them. I flip it and I say, 'Here--take it and put it against your head.' Would you do that?" People rush in, thinking they can handle it--a lot of people do handle it--but if fifteen million cannot handle it, then somebody ought to warn people about getting started. Take that fifteen million, add another five, and that is the number of people who are now addicted to gambling.

You understand I live here in this neighborhood. I go down to buy gas. Where I buy gas, they sell Lotto tickets. People come to me and laugh and say, "You bought any tickets lately?" I know it is a big joke. I see people buying them all the time. You know they are not slobbering at the mouth, and they are not wide-eyed...I know that. Five million people. If they get a buck, you do not know whether they will take that and use it for gambling or for buying food for their families. I say to you, "Shame, shame on a culture that destroys families to make taxation easier."

"I can handle that." You see, that is what all of us say. That is what Samson said. "I can handle it." But always on the side of the road is just tragedy after tragedy of families who recognize that they can't handle it. We don't recognize again what the Bible teaches about our own weaknesses, and the fact that we are not as strong as we put on ourselves as being. So, the lessons out of Samson are these:

One, be careful who you fall in love with. If you are here and thinking about dating, or are already dating and thinking about marriage, let me tell you be very careful who you fall in love with. People have said to me through the years, "I am going to marry him. I am in love with him." They become shocked when I say to them that love is not the only reason to get married. Love can be very emotional, but when you sit down and think through it, all a sudden you begin to be more rational. You recognize that it is not what you ought to do. You will do things for a person who says that they love you more than you will do

for anybody else. You need to be very careful that you don't get a "Delilah" or that she doesn't get a "Samson."

Two. The second thing you need to be aware of is that you need to understand that we cannot handle any circumstances. People have said to me on various occasions, "I don't see anything wrong with that." Well, I want you to examine the statement. "I don't see anything wrong." What that means is that you are thinking that you have infallibility, and that you can make the right choice in every circumstance. That is exactly what the Bible speaks against. The Bible says "Trust your way to the Lord and He shall direct your paths." Whenever I begin to think that all my decisions in life are based on my wisdom, I am always going to end up in trouble. Samson thought he could handle it. That was his problem. He thought he could handle it.

Three: There is a third lesson that comes. Be careful, because you don't recognize that there are people out there who will use you. One of the most troubled countries in the Americas, and really in the world, today is the country of Colombia. There is still a question about whether or not Colombia will be able to maintain an orderly society. The reason for that is that some of the strongest drug lords in the world are in Colombia. They are making so much money they can buy everybody off and buy the politicians off. They have an army as strong as the country of Colombia. Even with all of our fellows down there trying to help the Colombian army, we haven't been able to defeat the army of the drug lords because they have so much money. This past week they discovered a cave in the jungles of Colombia of counterfeiting hundred. . . . drug lords on television. They asked him the question, "Do you ever feel bad that your product is condemning hundreds of thousands of people to a living hell?" Do you know what his answer was? "No. I am a businessman. If they want to buy my product, that's their problem." You need to be aware there are folk who will look you in the eye and sell your soul to hell and never bat an eye. That is much of the world in which you live.

Four: The fourth thing we learn about Samson. Samson's ego was so big that he had to constantly show off to feed it. When I first started in the ministry, I knew what the word "hypocrite" meant. Hypocrite means that you act you like you are good when really you are bad. I have met a lot of hypocrites in my life. Part of my life, I am a hypocrite. I sometimes act better than I really am. But as I have gone through my ministry, I find more the other way. I find people who want to tell me that they are worse than they really are. They pride themselves in what they do. "Boy, look what I can do." What's the problem? The problem is like Samson. They have such a weak ego that the only way that they can get attention is to tell you how bad they are. I read it in the newspaper this week. A college kid just turned 21, so he decided to take 21 shots of whiskey as fast as he could. They had his funeral yesterday. What was he trying to say? "Ha! I can drink 21 shots of whiskey." My youngest son is a professor at a university. I called him. I said, "Tell me, son, how much of that goes on?" He said, "Daddy, we bury them every month." Part of the problem: "I can handle it." And the only way that you can get attention is to show how big and bad you are. What a tragedy!

The last word...anytime you turn away from God, you are weak. Our strength to live is in God. Whenever you cut yourself off from Him and say, "I can handle myself," you are rushing into a lake of sharks without any protection. Samson's hair was cut--which was nothing more than a sign of his commitment to God. He was saying to God, "I will keep my hair as a sign of my commitment to You." What he said to Delilah was, "I don't care about my commitment to God. I only want to care about you." The scripture said that all of a sudden, he became like everybody else. You see, when you cut yourself off from God, you become like everybody else. How tragic it is that so many of us try to go on our own strength and our own ingenuity and our own talent. We end up like one of those examples of a life that was ruined. I wish that you would understand today how much you need the Lord day by day. We have people in our church. They think they can go without reading the Bible every day, without praying every day. God said, "We needed strength enough." We needed to come to church at least one day out of every seven. Some of our folks think that you can come one month out of six. "I can handle it." The more that we turn away, the more we expose ourselves to difficulty and problems.

Let me tell you how the story ends. I love it. After his eyes were gouged out and after he was treated like a donkey, grinding meal by pulling an old stone around, the Bible said that "his hair began to grow again." Let me tell you what that means. Some of us have gone down some gosh-awful dead ends and some of us have made mistakes like Samson. But regardless of what has happened, there is hope. Hair can grow again. Your commitment to God can be renewed again. Your strength can be restored again.

Your family can be renewed again. The great news I wanted to give you is that if you will come to Him and trust in Him day by day, there is strength in living that you never knew was possible.

Some of you here today are still trying to make it without God. Today I wish that you would come to recognize your own weakness and give yourself to Christ for His forgiveness and for His help. Let me tell you the only way to get in this church. The only way to get in this church, or any church for that matter, is that you have to come and say, "I am a sinner. I cannot live like I want to live. I ask God to forgive me, and I need His strength." That is the requirement. When you don't want to be a part, what you are saying is "I can make it by myself." I wish today that you would say, "I need Him. I have lived long enough to know that I cannot live like I want to and like He wants me to, and I want to give my life to Him." Some of you here today are Christians who God has been leading to this church. You need a family to strengthen you and to help you, because you are weak. We need each other. You are going to come today to move your life and your membership.