

Judges 16:23-31 – “Samson: Vindicated”

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Intro: Samson was careless of the gifts God had given him and disrespected God. As we saw in our last study, God brought him under discipline, delivering Samson into the hands of his enemies, the Philistines. We may feel in our hearts that Samson got no better than he deserved, and we may even observe that morally, there wasn't much to choose between Samson and his captors. Both seem equally immoral and disrespectful of God. Yet tonight we'll see God draw a sharp distinction between His errant servant and the enemies of God and His people, the Philistines.

Proposition: God disciplines His erring people so He can vindicate them for His glory.

Billboard: (vv.23-27) God's Enemies: An Insult to the Living God
 (vv.28-31) God's Children: Disciplined, Restored, and Vindicated

(vv.23-27) God's Enemies: An Insult to the Living God – Though in many ways Samson may not seem much more moral than his enemies the Philistines, yet there was a sharp distinction between them. These verses give us a picture of who the Philistines were. **Judges 16:23–27 - 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.” 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.” 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.* Two groups are mentioned among the Philistines, “*the lords of the Philistines,*” and “*the people,*” the common population. Though sometimes people are more righteous than their leaders, and sometimes leaders more righteous than their people, in this case there is no difference between the two: both rejoiced that Samson, their enemy had been given into their hand. They not only rejoiced, but they blasphemed Samson's God, attributing the work of God to their idol, Dagon: “*Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.*” Samson was their prisoner, not because Dagon had done anything to cause it, but because God in discipline had caused Samson to fall into their power. To attribute the work of God to anyone or anything else is a blasphemous offense against the living God. The Philistines also displayed an arrogant pride, saying over again, “*Our god, has delivered our enemy into our hands.*” The enemies of God are all about their own selves. Furthermore, they cruelly made sport of God's servant Samson, saying, “*Call Samson, that he may entertain us.*” They had no human compassion for God's humiliated servant. In short, these enemies of God misjudged God's ways, thinking that once they had blinded His servant, God was defeated and in their power as well. They insulted the Living God. That was a fatal mistake. Note in these verses how God prepared them for judgment. He gathered them for judgment. They came expecting to party but stayed to perish. They made Samson stand between the two pillars that supported the house. In

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doing this, they signed their own death warrant. They had such little regard for Samson that they put him in the power of a mere boy. This naïve young man apparently suspected nothing when Samson asked to lean against the pillars of the house. Their lust for revenge and mockery of Samson apparently kept them from suspecting that he could do them any harm. Doubtless, their carelessness was intensified through inebriation. God providentially arranges His world for the overthrow of the enemies of His people.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Rebellion against God is blasphemous, and God will judge rebels in the end.

[ILLUSTRATION] Scripture tells us in **Hebrews 10:31** that - **31** *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* Sometimes people joke about what they will do when they arrive in hell. They cavalierly say things like, “I want to go there so I can be with all my friends!” Such people are like the Philistines. They have no idea what is about to happen to them.

[APPLICATION] To insult the living God is to fully merit the wrath that is about to come. To attribute God’s works in creation, history, or salvation to any power other than the Almighty is to insult God. To puff yourself up with pride and self-sufficiency is to slight Him. To withhold compassion from those He loves is to treat Him with contempt. To imagine that you have Him in your power – to take Him or leave Him as you please – is a permanent fatal error. God does no injustice when He delivers such people over for punishment. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

(vv.28-31) God’s Children: Disciplined, Restored, and Vindicated – The distinction God drew between the Philistines and His servant Samson is significant. Despite Samson’s boneheaded behavior, God heard him when he prayed: **Judges 16:28–31 - 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. Samson prayed for the first time since chapter 15:18, calling out to God to strengthen him one more time. How do we know that Samson was a man of faith? “Samson demonstrated a measure of faith by calling upon God and believing that God could and would help him (cf. Heb.11:32).”¹ He prayed, and he meant business too, because he followed through on his prayer with action. True! His prayer seems to have been more concerned with personal vengeance than for God’s honor or God’s*

¹ ESV Study Bible notes, pg. 466.

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people, but as we have seen many times in our study of Samson, God took what his knuckleheaded servant offered Him and used it for His glory. This is another instance! I wonder what went through the wine-soaked minds of the Philistine crowd when they heard him cry out, “*Let me die with the Philistines.*” Did they laugh? Did they fall silent as they watched him strain with all his might against the two pillars? Notice how verse 30 tells us that *the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it*. No one escaped – neither the leaders nor their people were spared when God brought down the house. We are told that Samson gave his life in this last battle against the enemies of God and His people, and that *the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life*. Who was really avenged here? God was insulted, and God was avenged. God identifies with the insults and suffering of His people and tells us in **Zechariah 2:8 - 8** *For thus said the LORD of hosts... he who touches you touches the apple of his eye*. Yes, God *disciplines* His people, but He *destroys* His enemies. Samson came under the Lord’s discipline, but the Philistines came under His judgment. In the end, Samson was disciplined, restored, and vindicated by God. What is the difference between Samson and the Philistines? Samson belonged to God; the Philistines belonged to “*the god of this world.*”

[DOCTRINAL POINT] God disciplines, restores, and keeps His people because we belong to Him.

[ILLUSTRATION] In many ways, Samson wasn’t much better morally than the Philistines. He didn’t seem to have much more regard for YHWY than the pagans. His pride and his lusts were about equal with God’s enemies’. What, then, was the difference?

[APPLICATION] The difference is grace. The difference between God’s enemies and God’s children is God’s grace. He has given His grace to His children. He has left His enemies in their sins. Samson was no paragon of virtue, as I’m sure you’ll agree. Nevertheless, God’s grace was present in Samson’s life, not because of who Samson was, but because of who God is – ultimately, because of who Jesus is. Every one of Samson’s weaknesses; every one of his failures; every one of his sins, was washed away in the blood of the Lamb just as yours, and mine, and the sins of all who belong to Him are washed away by God’s greatest gift of grace - Jesus. Grace truly is greater than all our sins.

Conclusion: God disciplines His erring people so He can vindicate them for His glory. Why does He do this? Why doesn’t He just toss us on the scrapheap when we make a mess of our lives, our testimonies, our churches? Wouldn’t it be easier if He just renounced His erring “Samsons” altogether? Yes. It would be easier, but it wouldn’t redound to His glory. His glory is to save the undeserving. P.S.: We’re all undeserving. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see.”