

**Salt - Called to be holy people**

We are all familiar with salt. It adds to the taste of food so many people add salt but we are warned not to use too much salt. Too much is bad for our health. In days before refrigerators salt was used to preserve meat, to keep the meat from going bad. Sailors especially used salted meat on long sea journeys.

So Jesus says, *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."* (Matthew 5:13) Our lives are to be like salt, to have an impact for good on the society around us. This means we must not lose our flavour. We need to continue to live holy lives and be obedient to God.

We saw last week that Israel had that same calling. <sup>6</sup> *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.* (Deuteronomy 7:6)

But they had failed to live up to their calling. They had become like the people around them, intermarried with the Philistines and worshipped their gods.

Then we saw that Samson was chosen to be a Nazarite; one set apart to be holy for God; he should not drink wine, touch anything unclean and never cut his hair. He was set apart to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. We saw that he had been given superhuman strength by God's Spirit so he could kill a lion with his bare hands and do other things no ordinary man could do.

But we found that rather than attacking the Philistines he had wanted to marry their women. The first was a Philistine woman in Timnah and we meet two more today. The only time he attacked them was when wanted personal revenge. All he seemed to be interested in was women and revenge.

We might wonder what is going on?! What sort of deliverer is this? But in 14:4 we were told, *"That this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel."*

Israel had been ruled by the Philistines for 40 years but the Israelites had just accepted this situation. They were happy to worship the Philistine gods. They weren't trying to gain their independence. They were not living up to their calling to be a holy people for their God.

So God had to stir things up. He was using Samson to create some conflict so he might deliver Israel from this oppression.

This week we see that Samson is attracted to two other Philistine women.

**WOMAN 2** - a Philistine prostitute.

*One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.* <sup>2</sup> *The people of Gaza were told, "Samson is here!" So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, "At dawn we'll kill him."* (16:1-3)

The Philistines seek to ambush him but Samson is awake to their plans and leaves in the night. The city gates would be closed in the night but this is no problem for Samson. He pulls the gates up by the gateposts, heaves them onto his shoulders and carries them to a hill near Hebron 68 kilometres away.

Gaza was the chief Philistine city. To have their gates destroyed like this by one man was a very shameful thing. Now he has stirred up the opposition of the whole nation. The rulers of the Philistines are determined to get him. Their opportunity comes with Samson falling in love with another Philistine woman, Delilah.

**WOMAN 3** - another Philistine

*<sup>4</sup>Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. <sup>5</sup>The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver." (16:4-5)*

They offer Delilah a lot of money; 1100 shekels silver is about 13kg. She sets about trying to get his secret. Like dripping tap!

First Samson says bind me with seven fresh bowstrings and I will be weak. So she does.

*<sup>9</sup>With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered. (16:9)*

Then he tells her to bind him with new ropes. But the same thing happens.

Thirdly he says to weave the seven locks of his hair on a loom. He is getting dangerously close to the secret, but again he breaks free.

You would think he would realise what she is trying to do! She wears him down and finally he tells her, *"No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."* (16:17)

She shaves his hair off and the Philistines overpower him. They put out his eyes and bind him with bronze and cast him into a prison.

He is weak as any man. Did Samson have magic hair? When it was long he was strong. When it was cut off and he has no strength.

We read, *He did not know that the Lord had left him.* (16:20) His strength is not in his hair. It is from God. Now God takes that strength away. Why? Is it because he has broken conditions of being Nazirite? No. He has done that before touching the lion's carcass and later a donkey jaw bone. No, God is not tied to outward signs. God is preparing for the knockout blow. He getting Samson to the place where can do most damage.

Verse 22 shows there is more to come: *But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.*

**Who is the winner?**

The Philistine lords are sure their god, Dagon has won. They want to celebrate his victory so they have a great sacrifice with praise and rejoicing. 3000 national leaders gather in Dagon's temple.

Samson is brought out to make fun of him. For a second time Samson cries out to God, but he is still not trying to deliver Israel. He is asking for personal revenge on the Philistines for his eye. Throughout his life he has only been motivated by desire for foreign women and for personal revenge.

God is concerned to deliver his people from the Philistines so God gives him strength again. He grasps the two central pillars of the temple. *Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.* (16:30)

Here is the knockout blow but Samson is not the winner. He lies dead in the rubble. He is a super strong spoilt kid, the Nick Kyrios of Israel.

The Philistines are down for the count, all their leaders are killed, but the nation lives to fight another day. It is not till 200 years later, till David comes that they are finally defeated.

Dagon is down also. He is shown to have no power.

The winner is ... Yahweh, the God of Israel, he is victorious!!! .... But no one is cheering. God's people are silent. They don't get it. They don't care.

Look at how God gave strength to Samson when he cried out. God could give strength to his people but they have ceased to cry out as we saw. They have given up on the battle. They have gone AWOL. They just want to live a peaceful comfortable life. They just want to be like the Philistines they lived with and they are happy to worship the Philistine gods.

**What do we worship?**

Are we still involved in the fight? The fight for personal holiness and for the kingdom of God? Perhaps we used to be involved in Beach Mission, Camps, Youth Group, Church ministries, and sharing our faith. What now? Are we just like the community around us? Are we just living for self rather than to serve God and to love our neighbour?

Are we seeking to be a holy people; to be a blessing to others? Or are worshipping the god's of the society around us? They obsessed with seeking personal pleasure and fulfilment; with seeking financial gain or with worldly success and status. These are the gods they worship.

Are these the gods we are really serving? What is the purpose of your life?

We see in this passage how committed God is to building his kingdom. He will do what it takes. Do we share that concern?

Israel had just accepted the rule of the Philistines. They were not seeking change. Not even asking God for help. They just wanted to live a comfortable life under Philistines. Have we become complacent in a world doesn't know God? Do we just say, "That's the way it is"? Or do we share God's passion to bring about change? Do we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness?

**What about Samson?**

What are to make of Samson? What sort of leader is he? Before we dismiss him completely we need to see what the New Testament says about him. In Hebrews 11 Samson is listed with the heroes of faith as an example for us. But he is obviously a flawed character as we have seen. But so are some of the other judges. Jephthah kills his own daughter.

What about the kings of Israel? David is the most godly king but he commits adultery and murder. Solomon marries many foreign women and is led to worship their gods. Many of the other OT kings are far worse. Even Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his disobedience.

It's not a pretty picture. But the Bible is realistic about sin. All are affected. Even the greatest leaders have their flaws. However we see that God is able to use flawed people. He works out his purposes and builds his kingdom through them. If he can use a man like Samson he can use any of us.

We can feel unworthy. I know that when I stand up and preach I don't always do the things I preach to others. I have my failings but I take heart when I see how God used people like Samson.

This is not to condone our sins. We mustn't be complacent about our failings but we can know that God can still use us. It is Satan who will tell us that we are too sinful. He will try to discourage us and make us give up.

SO:

1. Be encouraged. God can use you even with your failings. Don't give up.
2. Pray for our leaders that God will keep them faithful. There are failings that can destroy a person's ministry. It is only with God's help that they will be kept from falling.
3. Don't expect leaders to be perfect. It can be very disheartening when we see that a leader has some failing. But recognise that we are all sinful - the Bible is clear about that but know that God can use a leader in spite of their flaws.

Finally:

4. Know that God has sent the perfect leader, King, Jesus. He is the one we can trust and look to for salvation. He is the perfect example for us to follow.