Blinded By Pride
Judges 16:4-21

**Slide 1**
A minister once told this story about his father. When his father sold his business and retired, he got bored just sitting around – so he went to work as a meat inspector for the government.

They gave him a white coat and helmet and special knife, and his job was to go to meat plants and inspect the meat as it was taken from one part of the processing plant to the next.

Sometimes, there'd be some bad meat on the side of beef or pork, and he would take his knife and cut it away. It didn't take long - the workers appreciated his help.

However, other inspectors would shut down the entire line and order a worker to come over to do what his father did in one swipe of his knife.

So why shut the line down and make it harder for these people to do their job? Because they could. They had the authority and power to shut down the entire plant if they wanted to.

The meat inspectors didn't work for the company and they didn't care about the workers. They had power and they intended to use it!

His father told him, *"You give a man a white coat and some authority and he'll become a tyrant."*

Lord Acton, an English historian, politician, and moralist said, *"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."*

Someone else observed: *“People like Hitler and Napoleon have all committed shameful actions in the hopes of gaining absolute power. Authority, or simply the desire of control, can cause people to act in incomprehensible ways.”*

We see that in our own government today. In Judges 16, we read about a man who had absolute power. His name was Samson and it was God who gave Samson his power.

Samson was the Superman of his age. In the 1950s, George Reeve played the part of Superman.

The intro to the weekly series said, *“He was faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.”*

Now, I’m not sure if Samson could do all of that, but he did kill a lion with his bare hands and he did wipe out an entire army of Philistines with just jawbone of a donkey.

There was even one time when he carried an entire city gate a distance of about 40 miles.

Samson singlehandedly protected the people of Israel from their enemies. He wasn’t a man to anger.

In fact, the Philistines feared him so much that they were willing to pay Delilah the modern-day equivalent of about $80,000 to discover his weakness.

**Slide 2**
Regardless that his power came from God and that he protected the people of Israel, he was always a problematic hero.

On one hand, he protected Israel for about 20 years. Hebrews 11 even lists him as one of the great heroes of faith along with Gideon, Samuel and David.

So, Samson was an important person. He was impervious to pain. He was powerful beyond imagination. People feared and respected him, and he could do whatever he wanted because no one could stop him!

In fact, he became so important and so powerful that his power went to his head. As we've noted *"power tends to corrupt, and absolute power* (like he had) *corrupts absolutely."*

After a while he became so self-absorbed that he forgot all about God. Almost every time Samson displayed his great power, Scripture said, *"The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him* (Samson)*."*

So, you'd expect him to be a great man of faith and morals, but then, on the other hand, Judges tells us he slept with a prostitute, and we're pretty sure he was sleeping with Delilah as well.

But after he'd slept with the prostitute, Scripture never again said, *"The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him*."

He still had great power and strength, but it was like he thought he didn't need God anymore. Samson became blinded by his pride.

He became such a powerful man that God was no longer important to him, and after that it was only a matter of time before he was brought down.

Proverbs 11:2 says, *"When pride comes, then comes disgrace…"* and Proverbs 16:18 says *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* And, of course, that's what happened to Samson.

What can we learn from this?  What can Samson's blindness of pride teach us?

**Slide 3**
First, it teaches us that even the mighty can be taken down by pride. Samson had the power and the prestige to do whatever he wanted to do, and that led him to believe nothing could touch him.

There was a large church that had a rich and powerful Deacon.  He was highly respected, highly regarded, and he had money, but he also slept around.

When the preacher found out about it, he fired him.  But when the preacher moved on, the church re-instated that Deacon.  After all, he was a wealthy and powerful man.

About 5 years later, this large church had money problems.  One of the deacons, who was the treasurer, and was keeping 2 sets of books.

When this powerful Deacon learned of the fraud, he went to that deacon's house and burned the books.

He was a proud man.  A man with power and prestige and he wasn't going to allow any hint of scandal in his church.

When the dust settled, the church split, and the new church refused to have Deacons for the next 20 years.

Proud people leave a trail of damage and destruction everywhere they go, especially in the church.  Especially amongst Christians.

So, we need to be careful. That's why Paul wrote in II Corinthians 12:5b-10, *"I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Notice what Paul said here: the way to avoid becoming proud is to focus on God. Be content with your weaknesses and focus on God's strength.

When we do that, our greatest strengths come from us being content with our weaknesses, which, in turn, leaves room for God to be strong. The smaller we become, the more room God has to work.

Someone once said, *"True humility, does not mean thinking less of yourself. It means thinking of yourself less and thinking of God more."*

Corrie ten Boom told her friend Jill, *"People thank me so much that it used to worry me because I didn't want to get a big head. So, I began to collect those compliments like flowers. 'Thank you,' I'd say. 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.' Then at the end of the day I'd kneel down and I'd say, 'Here You are Jesus, they're all Yours.'"*

**Slide 4**
Next we see that pride can come from focusing on our abilities and accomplishments rather than focusing on God.

A young preacher was pleased that a woman in his congregation was always asking for copies of his sermons. One day his pride got the better of him, and he asked her about it. She replied, *“Oh, they’re just the perfect size for the bottom of my bird cage!”*

There’re times some of you will tell me how good a sermon was, and that always makes me feel good.

But I’m going to tell you, if it weren’t for God’s leading me, and helping me as I prepare for these sermons, all my sermons would be just about the right size to line the bottom of birdcage.

I’m not all that smart and I know it. If it weren’t for God helping me, I’d have nothing of any value to say. What strength I have comes from God.

But Samson forgot that. He forgot that his power came from God and that’s what destroyed him.

There’s a common misconception that Samson lost his power because he lost his hair. That’s true, but the real problem for Samson was that God had left him.

We’re told in Judges 16:20 that after Delilah cut Samson’s hair *“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.”*

You see Samson wasn't weak because his hair had been cut. He was weak because *"the LORD had left him.”*

His strength came from God, but his weakness came from losing touch with God. So, Samson didn't become weak because he’d lost his hair; he became weak because he’d lost his God.

He'd left God behind when he began to rely on his own strength. So, ultimately God left Samson.

**Slide 5**
Conclusion

The story of Samson is a story of a man who, out of pride and arrogance, chose to live his life his own way rather than God's and, in the end, suffered for his pride.

Now, what's interesting about Samson's story is that in spite of his colossal failure, in spite of his walking away from God, and in spite of his sexual immorality, he repented! And when Samson repented, God restored his strength.

In his final moments, the Bible tells us, *"…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."* Judges 16:30

Samson repented. He acknowledged that he'd been wrong and that's the same offer God makes to us today. In 1 John 1:9 we're told that *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

I want to close with this story of a hero of our day who suffered much as Samson had in his. Years ago there was a man named Earvin Johnson; we know him as Magic Johnson.

He was one of the greatest basketball stars of his day and yet in 1991 the world was shocked by the disclosure that "Magic" had HIV. It was a terrible moment for this sports legend. Other players wouldn't take the court with him.

The situation was making a circus sideshow out of his disease and was detracting from the game. So Magic Johnson hung up his shoes and walked away from the game that had made him a star.

In an interview on Face To Face with Connie Chung he said, *“I lived the bachelor’s life and I’m paying for it.”*

But then he went on to say, *“I agree with those who say my lifestyle was morally wrong, I’m not trying to deny it. I’m trying to battle for my life and the only thing I can ask for is forgiveness. It was my fault. Morally, I was wrong sleeping with a lot of women. I wish it hadn't happened, but it did. All I can do is ask God’s forgiveness and leave it in His hands. All I can do is pray.”*

Like Samson in his day, Johnson suffered bondage and pain because of his sinfulness, and just like Samson, he repented.

So, what has God done with Magic Johnson since that time? Well, 35 years later Magic is not only still alive, he’s married and has three children. In fact, he just celebrated his 35th wedding anniversary this past September.

Every day he works out from 7 in the morning till 1 in the afternoon, lifting weights, running sprints and playing basketball scrimmages with others in the gym.

He also runs a financial empire worth millions of dollars. But he does something special with his fortune: he invests in inner city businesses, trying to help other black families attain the success that he now enjoys.

Reflecting on his disease, he said he was sad that the circumstances by which he got it will be part of his legacy, but he believes he was chosen to get the disease because *"God needed someone, and he picked me."*