Samson - Man of Faith



Mike Connell & Shane Willard

Samson (2 sermons)

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Audio Transcripts of Sunday Sermons

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The Story of Samson is told from two very different perspectives. Shane Willard talks about a joke that got out of hand, a spoiled brat's cycle of violence and revenge, and of Peacemakers and Escalation. I merely did to them, what they did to me. Mike Connell talks about the grace of god, how he loves us even in the midst of defeat and disgrace, and about the goodness of God to someone who's fallen over, fallen down.

Being a Peacemaker (by Shane Willard) Peacemakers and Escalation. Our hero of the faith was a rebellious, spoilt brat, who wanted his own way, in every single way. This was a man that was sleeping with prostitutes on his wedding night, because he got depressed, because his best man stole his wife. From what started out as a joke no-one understood, a fascinating cycle of violence ensues, based on: because you did this, I now have a right to do that. I merely did to them, what they did to me. This way of living will always bring death.

Samson - Man of Faith (by Mike Connell) Keys from the story of Samson, about the grace of god, how he loves us even in the midst of defeat and disgrace. This story is about the goodness of God to someone who's fallen over, fallen down. You are not beyond the reach of God no matter where you are today. The best days of our life are ahead of us if we're in the hands of God.

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Being a Peacemaker (by Shane Willard)

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Let me ask you a question, and be careful how quick you answer this inside. This is an internal question: If you could go to heaven without Jesus, is He still worth following? If heaven and hell wasn't the issue, is Jesus still worth following?

You can't go to heaven without Jesus, but I think it's very important for us to play with that thought for a second. If you could go to heaven without Jesus, is He still worth following?

If the answer to that is yes, then I would ask us why? If the answer to that is no, I would ask you, why are you using Him as a fire escape only?

And that would also tell me why our lives are not victorious, and it's because we've become a group of people who are all about getting to go to heaven one day, and we've lost sight of the fact that Jesus is actually worth following, even if there was no such thing as heaven, because His way is the best way for our life.

If, when we died, if we just died - Jesus is still the best way? He's still the best, and that comes down to faith. It comes down to trust. Do we really trust that His way is the best way for our life?

Do we really believe that mercy is better than justice? Really, like do we really believe that? It's easy to believe that with other people, but do we really believe that for ourself? Do we really believe that mercy triumphs over justice? Do we really believe these things?

I want to spend the rest of the night talking about one area, that takes a lot of faith for us to live, but as leaders in God's biggest idea, we should be living it, and that is this.

Jesus said it this way: Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are people who bring peace to situations, instead of retaliation.

We're all about retaliation, aren't we? It's the way of the world. It's been that way

since Adam and Eve.

Adam named his wife Eve. God never named her “Eve” - Adam named her Eve.

The problem with that was it was Adams job to name the animals; so when Adam names Eve 'Eve', essentially he's calling her an animal. He's saying: you animal - look what you've done to us. It's retaliation. It's escalation.

How many of you have lived long enough to know that retaliation and escalation is the way of life? It just is. You married folks, have you ever got into an argument with your spouse about how to cut a tomato? It escalates into insults about the other person's mother. It's called...

[Pastor Mike] You're married aren't you?

[Shane Willard] Yeah. It's called escalation. It's just escalation. It escalates. Things escalate. I mean has anybody besides me ever gotten into a conflict, and when you walk away from the conflict, that's when you think of everything you could have said? Yeah. Do you let it go there, or do you have imaginary conversations? We love imaginary conversations, don't we? We love them.

Why do we love imaginary conversations so much? Because we never lose! If you're here tonight, and you're losing imaginary conversations, get your head checked - it's your imagination. You can win!

We love imaginary conversations, and there's so much teaching I could do around imaginations, but I don't want to go there tonight. I want to talk about being a peace maker - so we rationalise escalation.

We rationalise things that the Bible clearly says not to do - and it could be: yeah, but I had a bad day. Yeah, but I was stressed; yeah, but I had pressure; yeah, but they're weird. They're weird - which essentially all that's saying is: your way is better.

Like how many of you know some weird people? We all know weird people right? Let me let you in on something. They think you're weird. Weird is relative, but we're all ethnocentric.

People tell me, because I'm American, people tell me: oh you people from

America, you think the whole world's like America. Well, that's kind of okay, I'll give you that, yeah. We probably do, but so do you. You think the whole world's like South Africa, you think the whole world's like New Zealand.

We're all ethnocentric. Ethnocentric is just a big word that means: you think that your world is normal; and that everybody else's world is weird. That your world actually creates the normal for everybody else, and becomes the gauge for what normal is for everybody. It's called ethnocentricity, and we're all like that.

Let me tell you about a guy I know named Bubba. Bubba was from Colquitt County, Georgia. He's a redneck, and Bubba's never been out of Coalquitt County, Georgia in his whole life. So he was with his church, and he got the opportunity to go on a mission's trip with his church to Peru. So now Bubba's never been outside - Bubba's never been on a plane. He's never been anywhere. He's just been in Coalquitt County, Georgia; and so he went to his pastor.

He said: now what do I need to do to go on this trip? The pastor said: okay, well you need this much money, you need a passport; and so Bubba went to Walmart to try to get his passport. He had no idea about anything, and they sell those at Walmart? You serious? So this was what he was; so he's never been on a trip in his life, and his first trip ever was from Atlanta International Airport - which is the size of Napier (city) okay - Atlanta International Airport to Peru.

So his first time ever on a plane is like 12 hours. Everything was new to this guy, how to get a passport, it was unbelievable. So he gets on the plane, and he's sitting next to the pastor; and he leans over, he says: pastor, how long's this flight? And the pastor says: I don't know Bubba, 12 hours or so. He says: oh my God, pastor, I'm not going to make it! The pastor says: well, what do you mean Bubba? He said: well I got real nervous, and I drank me about seven Coca Colas, and I'm about to go all over myself right here. The pastor said: well Bubba, they've got toilets on the plane. He said: toilets on the plane! How'd they do that? When it flushes where's it go? Those poor people down below! That's unbelievable!

So everything was new to him; so they land in Peru, and they land at like 8am; and there's no sleeping, because it makes jetlag worse, so they just go right into it, and they're helping all these kids and stuff like that. So later that afternoon they're having a downloading meeting, like a debriefing meeting, and the pastor's

- he says: oh what did God show you today? Everybody's saying roughly the same things.

If you've ever been on these types of trips, the first day everybody says the same thing: oh pastor, I can't believe how much we have, and how little they have, and how happy they are with how little they have, and how - and so everybody's saying this. Everybody's saying this, and so the pastor finally gets to Bubba.

He says: Bubba, what did you learn today? Bubba said: well pastor, I don't know what all these people are talking about. He said I'm going to tell you something right now. These are the smartest kids in the world. The pastor said: well Bubba, like they seem normal kids to me. What are you talking about? He said: normal? These are the smartest children in the whole world. The pastor said: well Bubba, honestly, I'm lost. You're going to have to fill me in. What did they do that was so smart?

He said: pastor, open your eyes man, they ain't but four years old, and can already speak Spanish! That is unbelievable! How smart you gotta be, to be doing stuff like that? See Bubba thought everybody spoke English, because he did.

So we all have all of these rationalisations for what it means to retaliate and escalate and make things worse. We think people are weird. We have a bad day, we have a list of probably 1000 excuses of why we stepped outside of Jesus' way to live. We probably did it today. We probably spouted off at somebody today, and we thought: oh, God will forgive me for that, and He understands.

I had a bad day - and the truth is: God does understand, and He will forgive you for that; but it's affecting your future, and the future of the people you love. It's affecting your faith. We start rationalising our way.

So I want to talk about being a peace maker. I want to do that by looking at the life of one of the heroes of the faith. I want to look at a story that isn't just a story about Him, it's a story about all of us - in Judges 14 - we'll find our self in this story.

This guy's a hero of the faith. Somehow he made it into that list. As you read his story, you'll realise that he was a rebellious spoilt brat, who wanted his own way,

in every single way. How he made it into the heroes of the faith, I don't know. This was a man that was sleeping with prostitutes on his wedding night, because he got depressed, because his best man stole his wife. He made it into the heroes of the faith somehow. This man was something else. I think we'll find our story in this.

It's about a guy with excessive amounts of strength – Samson, in Judges 14. Samson went down to Timnah, and there he saw a young Philistine woman; and when he returned he said to his father and mother: I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah, now get her for me as my wife.

Do you see his tone, this elevated sort of: I want what I want - and I want it right now, kind of thing?

His father and mother replied: isn't there an acceptable woman amongst the relatives from all of those other people, amongst all your people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?

But Samson said to his father: get her for me, she's the right one. And his parents didn't know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.

And Samson went down to Timnah, together with his father and his mother; and as they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. And the spirit of the Lord came upon him in power, so he tore the young lion apart with his bare hands, as he might have done a young goat. But he neither told his father nor his mother of this.

Then he went down and talked to the woman, and he liked her. Sometime later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands, and he ate it as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they ate it too, but he did not tell them where he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.

So here's a guy that really doesn't have much regard for himself. He doesn't have a regard for the law of God. Was it against the law to scoop food out of a dead thing? Absolutely! So not only does he scoop food out of a dead thing for

himself; he spreads the uncleanness around, by giving it to his parents, and not telling them where it came from. So he, in essence, makes his parents unclean, and doesn't tell them: you need to offer a sacrifice. He is playing with God.

It says: and when he rejoined them again, they ate it, he didn't tell him where it came from. Now his father went down to see the woman, and Samson had made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms to do. When he appeared, he was given 30 companions. Let me tell you a riddle, Samson said to them, and if you can give me the answer within seven days of the feast, I'll give you 30 linen garments and 30 sets of clothes. But if you can't tell me the answer, you must give me 30 linen garments and 30 sets of clothes. Tell us your riddle, they said, let's hear it.

So let's make sure we know where we are in the story. He gets to where he's going, and he says: listen - Samson just loved to be the life of the party. He said: listen, I've got a joke for you, it's a riddle. If you could tell me the answer, I'll give you 30 pieces of clothes and linen garments. These are expensive things, 30 linen garments; and if you can't tell me the answer, you have to give me 30 linen garments, so you've got a 30 to one chance here.

They said: well let's hear it, let's see what's going on. He said: out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.

Now obviously they didn't understand this riddle, because he just made it up. He just made it up off the top of his head, out of an experience he had, that no one knew he had. For three days, they could not get the answer.

Now let's stop and make a mark in our self, as we examine this for our own life. This whole situation started out as a joke that no one understood. This is where this started, was a relatively innocent joke.

Actually it started out as a complete dismissal of God's way of life, and he scoops food out of a dead thing. He then makes a joke out of it, and he makes a joke out of an experience that only he had. He had it alone. He didn't tell anybody about it - so obviously they won't get the joke.

This thing starts out as a fairly benign situation - a joke no one understands, but watch how it escalates, and it escalates very quickly. It's the basic way of the

world, is to escalate.

For three days they could not explain the answer, so on the fourth day they said to Samson's wife: coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death.

Now this thing escalates fairly quickly. This thing starts out as a joke no one understands; and within four days you've got the threat of burning an entire family alive. Now watch what happens:

Did you invite him here to rob us? Then Samson's wife threw herself on him sobbing: you hate me! You don't really love me! You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer; and Samson said: I haven't even explained it to my father and mother, so why would I tell you? And she cried the whole seven days of the feast.

Do you see Samson's dilemma? I mean Samson's heart attitude: why would I tell you? Um, I should tell you, because they're going to burn you, if I don't. It never even crosses his mind!

You're talking about a joke that no one understands, escalating into the threat of burning; then her husband says: why would I tell you? What reason - as if burning her isn't enough reason! I haven't even explained to my father and mother, so why should I explain it to you?

She cried the whole seven days of the feast, so on the seventh day, he finally told her, because she continued to nag him; and she in turn explained the riddle to her people.

Before sunset on the seventh day, the men of the town said to him: what is sweeter than honey, what is stronger than a lion; and Samson said to them: if you had not ploughed with my cow, you would not have solved the riddle.

So this thing starts out as a joke no one understands; it escalates into threats of burning; she finds out the answer, they tell him the answer - and now he's calling his wife a cow. This thing has escalated very, very quickly.

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power, and he went down to Ashkelon, and he struck down 30 of their men, stripped them of their

belongings, and gave their clothes to those who explained the riddle. Why did he do that? Because that was the bet, remember? The bet was: if you tell me the riddle, I give you 30 pieces of clothes. If I tell you the riddle, then you have to give me 30 pieces of clothes. They tell him the riddle, even though they cheated; and so what he does is, he goes down, he says: you know what? I owe you 30 pieces of clothes, fair enough. So what I'm going to do, I'm going to kill 30 of your friends, strip them naked, and I'll give you their clothes.

This thing started out as a joke no one understands, and it escalates into now 30 people have lost their lives, and it keeps going. Watch how revenge works.

Burning with anger, he went up to his father's house, and Samson's wife was given to his friends, who had attended him at the wedding.

So his best man at the wedding - the guy gave Samson's wife to him. So this thing starts out as a joke no one understands, and now there's all of this tension.

Has anyone ever had a moment like this, where everything starts out light, and then somebody says something stupid in the room and everything escalates, and you just want to go hide? That's this.

It starts out as a joke no one understands, escalates into a threat of burning, they figure out the riddle, he murders 30 people, strips them of their clothes to pay the debt from the riddle. As a result of that, her father gives her to his best man, instead of to him. Gee - and it just keeps going.

Later on at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife; and he said: I'm going to my wife's room; but her father would not let him go in.

I was so sure you thoroughly hated her that I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive?

I don't know what Samson was looking at him like, for him to say that, because that makes no sense - that I gave her to your friend. Isn't her younger sister more attractive?

In other words, Samson's look on his face must have been unbelievable. Take her instead; and Samson said to them - now if you're a note taker, you want to note

this, because this is the basic way of the world.

Samson said to them: this time, I have a right to get even with the Philistines, so I will really harm them. In other words, this is what the basic way of the world, this is the anti-peace maker: since you have acted this way; now I have a right to step outside of Jesus, to unwrap my tassels, and to deal with you harshly. Now if you missed the tassels thing you need to get that, but we do this all the time.

If Jesus was: why did you act that way? Don't you know the way of Jesus? Don't you know that that's not in the way of Jesus?

Yeah, but Jesus, did you know what they did? They acted this way, so that gave me a right to act that way. And it's an escalation pattern, that goes nowhere good fast, and you're going to see this pattern in the rest of the story.

So he went out and he caught 300 foxes, and he tied them tail to tail in pairs, and then he fashioned a torch to every pair of tails, and he lit the torches, and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines, and he burned up all the shocks and the standing grain, together with the vineyards and the olive groves.

When the Philistines asked: who did this, they were told: Samson, the Timnite son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend.

Remember now this thing starts out as a fairly innocent joke no one understands, and it escalates into a threat of burning; they figure out the joke; he kills 30 men to pay the debt of the joke; his father-in-law gives his wife away; then Samson says: because you've done this to me, now I'm going to really harm you.

And in an agricultural community, he burns down all their grain, which meant he ruined their economy for the whole year. This thing has escalated from a joke no one understands, to 30 people have died, his wife has been taken from him, the economy of an entire nation is ruined, and 300 foxes have lost their lives.

Hmm, so now he takes 300 foxes and he ties them - now you've got to give him points for creativity on this. Come on now, you've got to give him some points! So it goes, because his wife was given to his friends; so the Philistines went up - now watch how it escalates - because he did that, the Philistines went up and burned her to death.

So now, now they said: why did Samson burn our grain down? Oh, he burned the grain down because his father-in-law gave his wife to his best man; so the Philistines said: oh, they're the cause of it, so they go and they burn the father and the daughter to death. This thing is escalating out of control!

So they went and burned her and her father to death; and Samson said to them: since - now watch, here it is again - Samson said to them: since you have acted this way, now I won't stop until I get my revenge on you. Since you did this, now I have a right to do this.

That is not leadership in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is: blessed are the peace makers. The fact that God is working in your life, does not mean that the way you're acting is right; because God was working in Samson's life obviously, but it didn't mean that what he was doing was right.

Since you have acted this way, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you; and he attacked them viciously, and slaughtered many of them. Now how many that is, I don't know, a lot. Then he went down and stayed in a cave at the rock of Etam, and the Philistines went up and encamped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi.

The men of Judah asked: why have you come here to fight us? We have come to take Samson prisoner they answered, to do to him, just as he has done to us. Since he acted this way, now I'm going to act this way.

Then 3000 men from Judah went down to the cave at the rock of Etam, and said to Samson: don't you realise that the Philistines are rulers over us? Why have you done this to us?

And this was Samson's answer: and he answered: I merely did to them, what they did to me.

Is it almost like God is in charge of a bunch of six year olds? Why did you act that way? I only - since they acted that way, now I act this way. Well why did you do that? Oh, because he did this, now we can do that. Oh but why did you do that? Oh, since I merely did to them, what they did to me. It's the way of the world.

And they said to him: we've come to tie you up, and hand you over to the

Philistines; and Samson said: swear to me, that you won't kill me yourselves. Agreed, they answered - we will only tie you up, and hand you over to them - we will not kill you.

So they bound him with two new ropes, and led him from the rock, and as they approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power. The ropes of his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands.

Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it, and struck down 1000 men that day. Then Samson said: with a donkey's jawbone, I have made donkeys of them.

Wow. This thing started out as a joke no one understands, and it escalated into 30 men losing their lives, to a whole family being burned, to the entire economy of a nation being gone, to 1000 men dying, to many be slaughtered, all the whole time, every side saying this is their defense: I'm only doing what he did. I have a right to get even.

So if you finish the story, they take him, and they end up, they start sending prostitutes to him, and he has a particular weakness for this, so they start sending prostitutes to him. There was one prostitute named Delilah, and she got to him in a very personal way.

They get him, and they put his eyeballs out, and they say to him: you thought you made donkeys out of us, we're going to make a donkey out of you. They give him the job of a donkey - winding a millstone.

Hmm, and in the middle of all that, no one no one learns anything. They keep one-upping each other, until finally the Philistines are throwing a party, and everybody's in the temple of Dagon, and they bring Samson out to make fun of him, because enough just can't be enough.

He asks God for strength one more time, and God gives it to him, and he pulls down the whole temple on their heads, and everybody dies.

This thing started out as a joke no one understood, and God used the basic human condition to judge the whole Philistine nation. Now the fact that God

used the basic human condition to judge it, does not mean we have a right to act that way. It's an example of how not to live - that this way of living, will always bring death.

How many of you - and don't answer this out loud, I'm just asking a question. How many of you are still dealing with revenge thoughts about something that happened a long time ago? How many of you know someone who is?

How many of you know someone who actually, their lives have been wrapped up in revenge so much, that they don't know where it stops and where it starts?

How many of you know that there's no end to this pattern, that you'll never, ever, do enough to make it alright.

Is this anything new, two different groups of people in the Middle East, arguing over land start one upping each other to no end? Is this really that new? It's still going on now - one group of people straps bombs to their chest, and they walk into a public place and blow themselves up. The other group of people says: since you've blown yourself up, and blown us up with you, we're going to shoot missiles over the top; and I go with the whole missile crowd, but nonetheless - yeah, it's a smarter way to go. You just think, one day they're going to run out of those suicide guys, you know? Like eventually you just run out of guys that are crazy enough to do that, don't you?

But it's just all back and forth, and back and forth, and it's a basic pattern in the world; that if we can really trust God, if we can really trust that Jesus' way is the best way for our life, we can get out of that, and we can be leaders; because the leaders are the ones who are acting different. The leaders are the ones who can step up and say: no, no, no, that's not the way to live; this is a better way to live.

Here's the basic pattern. Here's what we see. This story isn't just about Samson. This is a story about me, and about you, and about husbands, and about wives, and about co-workers. This is about every time in our life that our home turned into an Everybody Loves Raymond episode gone very wrong. This is a story - this is how it goes.

Here's how it goes: there's a basic pattern of revenge, in the way of the world. The first thing that happens is offence. So you have an offence; somebody does

something wrong.

The second thing that happens is, somebody gets vilified, so each party vilifies the other. Surely your heart was bad, surely you meant to do that, and we judge everybody's heart, we judge the motivation of their heart, like: you surely couldn't have just made a mistake. Surely you meant to really harm me, so we vilify the adversary.

And then we make an excuse. We fail to accept any responsibility for our self; and the way we do that is we say: since they did it, now I'll do it.

So we have an offence; and then we vilify the adversary; then we make excuses to unwrap the tassels. We make excuses to unwrap the tassels, and our excuse is always about somebody else. It's blaming, it's: since you did that, now I'll do this; and then you have escalation, so it goes from offence to vilification, to excuses, to escalation; and in escalation, that's where you go from a joke that no one understands, to killing 1000 men in one day, to eventually killing everybody.

This thing escalates, and then you hold the pattern over the other person's head: it's all your fault. Since you did this, that's the reason this whole thing happened, and they go: no, no, no, you started it with this right, and you do this whole thing. It's like God is dealing with a bunch of six year olds; and then we make the excuse of: this is just how the world is. That's the basic way of the world.

Of course Jesus died on the cross to make a public spectacle of the basic way of the world, and the worst thing is that we don't learn anything, so we repeat the pattern.

We don't learn anything, and this is built in to even our cartoons. Did you watch Tom and Jerry as a kid? Did anybody ever wonder: when will Tom ever learn not to stick his head in the hole? He's always after Jerry so much, that he loses sight that every time he sticks his head in the hole, Jerry hits it with a hammer, or blows his head up or whatever. That's Tom and Jerry.

How about Roadrunner and Coyote? You watch Roadrunner and Coyote, and you're like: don't strap the rocket to your back. It's going to send you over a mountain; or you know when he paints the picture? Yeah, like he cuts the road off, and then he paints the picture, and then Roadrunner runs right through it.

Then he steps up, and a truck comes from the other way and hits him. It's like what are you doing? Like, just be a peace maker. To make peace between the two of you would be a lot less painful!

Or how about Popeye, Popeye ran for what, 17 years? Seventeen years, once a week, Popeye, and it's always the same story. Popeye loves Olive Oyl; Bluto loves Olive Oyl. Bluto kidnaps Olive Oyl, Popeye goes to get Olive Oyl out of Bluto's house. Popeye goes over there, Bluto beats up Popeye. A magical can of spinach appears. Popeye eats his spinach, Popeye gets strong, Popeye beats up Bluto. Popeye gets the girl every week, exactly the same, exactly the same every week. Every week! Did anybody besides me ever watch Popeye, and go: Popeye, eat your spinach FIRST!

We just don't learn anything. We just don't learn anything. There's so much about this. Jesus had to deal with this, and He dealt with this for me, and He dealt with this for you.

Look at Matthew 26:47-54. While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the 12 arrived with a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and elders to the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them. The one I kiss, arrest Him; and going at once to Jesus, Judas said: greetings rabbi and kissed Him.

And Jesus said: friend, do you've come for. Then the men stepped forward and seized Jesus and arrested Him, and with that one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

And Jesus said to him: put your sword back in its place, for all who live by the sword, will die by the sword. Do you think that I cannot call upon My Father, to at once put at My disposal more than 12 legions of angels? How then would the scriptures be fulfilled?

A legion was a Roman platoon. He's saying: they've come with one platoon, I've got 12. If you want to go sword for sword doc, we can go right now, and I will win, but that would destroy my way of life.

Jesus had said all along: blessed are the peace makers; if someone strikes you on

your right cheek, turn the other cheek. If someone wants you to go one mile, go two; and His disciples who'd been with Him for three and a half years, they didn't get it.

They'd come to arrest Jesus with swords and clubs, and instantly they went back to the basic way of the world; you're going to kill Him, we're going to kill you - and Peter misses and cuts off his ear, which was instant death penalty by the way. And Jesus saves his life; He's like: you are coming to take my life, but I'm going to put your ear back on - that is the way of the kingdom of God.

You're coming to hurt me, but I'm still going to heal you. See the basic way of the world is: since you've come to do this to me, now live without your ear. That's the basic way of the world, but the basic way of the kingdom of God is: you've come to hurt me, but I've come to bless you. And Jesus dealt with that. He dealt with that. He was teaching a different way to live, called the kingdom of God.

Jesus could have gone sword for sword and won, but He wanted to teach a different way. He wanted to teach a way to publicly defeat the way of the world. He wanted to teach a way of peace.

It says at that time, Jesus said to the crowd: am I leading a rebellion - that you come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sit in the temple courts teaching, you didn't arrest me there.

But this is all taken place, so that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled; then all the disciples deserted Him and fled. When the pressure was on, they deserted that way of life.

You guys know the rest of the Passion of the Christ, all the beatings, all the harassing, the pulling His beard out, spitting. At every phase, He was still a peace maker.

At the end of it, everybody who did all of that to Him, He still forgave them. He was still blessing people, up to the very end of His life. He was still letting thieves into heaven. That is the way of our rabbi, that is the way.

Why did Jesus die on the cross? Why? Is it just to forgive you of sins? I hope

not. Is it just to forgive me of sins? I hope not. You know why Jesus died on the cross?

Part of the reason Jesus died on the cross, was so that here, now, in Hastings, New Zealand, we could talk about something like this, and everybody here who's been hurt and traumatised, can walk out of here tonight knowing: it's still possible to be a peace maker.

Jesus died on the cross, so that the basic way of the world doesn't have a rule on your life any more, so you don't have to escalate. You don't have to one-up people who hurt you.

Jesus died on the cross so that anybody here who was violated at a young age, they can forgive. They can deal with that pain, and they can go on. Jesus died so that every woman here, who was hurt by your father, and you're married now - He died, so that you won't make your husband pay for the sins of your father. He died for that.

Jesus died on the cross, so that every one of us who've had friends desert us and flee, in our moment of need - they deserted and fled; He died on the cross for all of us who've had that happen, so that we could know that it was possible to cook breakfast on the beach for the very people who've hurt us the worst.

Jesus died on the cross, so that we could be peace makers, and not be a slave to the way of the world, which says: since you've treated me this way, now I get to treat you that way.

He died on the cross so we could be leaders in His biggest idea, and leaders in God's biggest idea are committed to being peace makers. The cross here was not passive. You realise being a peace maker is not passive? It's not some kind of just passive thing that just happens.

Being a peace maker is an active decision, a pursuit of a way of life, called the kingdom of God. Jesus was hardly passive when they were beating Him. Jesus was actively choosing: I will not call 10,000 angels to end this. He was actively choosing: I will be a peace maker at all cost, because that way is the best way for life, and I will die for that way, before I'll let it be sabotaged by one moment with a sword.

So where are we with that? Where are we? How freeing does that make us, to know that we can go home tonight, and if an argument breaks out, somebody can be a peace maker.

Of course we say: which one needs to be the peace maker? The one who's most mature! The one who's the most mature will act first, so everybody go home and have a competition on who can be the most mature!

It means that tomorrow at work with that guy - you know that guy? That guy! The one you wish God would just go ahead and take to heaven, that guy. Yeah, it means that you can bless him, if he shows up to hurt you.

Do you know disempowering it is? Somebody says something bad about you; you realise that all these pastors who get talked about bad, you realise how disempowering it is, if those same pastors - if somebody said something bad about me, the best thing I can do is get up on that stage and bless them from the stage, because then everybody's thinking: what's wrong with you? He's blessing you.

Jesus' way was: you always gain authority through generosity. You always gain authority through being a peace maker; but the question is this: do we have the faith to believe for that, or do we settle for one cookie instead of three, and take our own way and escalate? Then all we'll get is what we can bring, which is more escalation.

Jesus died so that you and I could go out of here tonight, and for the rest of our life be peace makers, for blessed are the peace makers.

Lord, you're the best, and we just give You our leadership, we give You our hearts, we give You our minds, we just commit our self again to You, and say openly: Jesus, Your way is the best way for my life.

If you're willing to just make that word of faith confession tonight, just out loud after me, with some gusto, say it this way: Jesus, [Jesus,] Your way [Your way] is the best way [is the best way] for my life [for my life.]

And Lord, we proclaim that regardless of heaven and hell, we would still follow You, even if we could go to heaven without You, for Your way is the best way

for my life.

Maybe right now before you leave, because we've got a few minutes, I just want you to do some business there with God. Maybe I just feel inside to do this. Maybe you're here tonight with your spouse, and now with head bowed and eyes closed, maybe you've been guilty of some of this escalation, and maybe you just need to reach over and take your wife, or take your husband by the hand, and just give it a quick squeeze and say: hey, it's going to be okay. It's kind of your way of saying: it's going to be okay, we're going to stop this now.

Maybe you're here tonight and you have children, and things have escalated with them, and you just need to agree together that it's going to be okay. Maybe as a community of people, maybe just individually right where you are, you need to make a conscious decision to stand against the wiles of the devil that says: it's the best life to escalate. It's never the best life to escalate. It's always the best life to be a peace maker. Maybe that's what we need to do.

God bless you tonight to know that you serve Jesus, and Jesus believes in you more than you believe in Him. God bless you tonight to know that you're leaders in God's biggest idea. He's got this huge plan for us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Pastor Mike takes up an offering for Shane]

Great to have you here. Great river of life. We're going to just take up an offering right now, and just honor God in giving. One of the things I noticed: Noah believed the word of God. He had a word from God in his generation, and he believed it. It's really amazing how, as a man of God, he took hold of what God said in His day, acted on what God said, and then became a pioneer of faith in his generation.

The Bible tells us that straight after the earth had been destroyed, and the ark came to rest, that he offered a sacrifice. Interesting, you'd think that the last thing you would do, when all the animals and everything has been wiped out, and there's only just an ark full of animals left in the whole world. You'd think the last thing a person would consider doing, is to take them, and to start to offer some to the Lord. Quite extraordinary really, isn't it?

But this just shows you, just in Noah's heart, just a heart of gratitude for the word

that God had given to him, for the grace that God had given to him, to be able to walk in what he'd been shown; and he expressed it by building an altar, and making an offering to the Lord.

That was a very, very expensive offering; and I believe that one of the things that is an evidence of being right before the Lord, is that we have a heart of generosity to God, a heart of generosity for how He gives to us. We take up an offering, just a free will offering, just out of our heart, out of a heart that's generous and thankful, and says:

Lord, thank You for what you've given to me. May you give me also grace to walk in it; and our offering is a tangible way, it's an act of righteousness, a tangible response just to what God has been speaking to our hearts.

Shane lives by faith. That means he has no income from anywhere. The only income he has is what people who receive his ministry give to him, and so it's always right that we sow, and we sow generously, so we want to do that, want to give generously. Okay, come on, let's give Shane a great welcome as he comes back up again.

Samson - Man of Faith (by Mike Connell)

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I want you to look with me in Judges 16. If I was to mention to you the name Samson, what would come to mind? What words would come to the mind straight away? [Delilah] Isn't that interesting? Delilah is the first thing that would come to mind.

I'm glad you said that word, because it indicates that our tendency is to look at life from a very negative perspective. That story is not about Delilah by the way. It's about a man of faith, a man who believed God, in spite of massive failure; and the thing is, he's named a hero of faith, not because of all he did before he met Delilah, but what he did after he was restored.

So our first response, when we think of the name Samson, is immediately you think Delilah; and immediately you think of the sexual sin, the bondage, the troubles he got into; and so our mind tends to look at him, and in a way we kind of feel sorry for him, and we feel like: well, we wouldn't do that. We've just seen what happened to him; we wouldn't do the same, and tend to look at it out of a negative and prideful perspective, but the Bible has a different perspective on him.

If we were to check up in Hebrews 11 verse 32, we would find that the Holy Ghost specifically encouraged someone to write down, and He recorded out of four thousand years of history, men who God liked, men who impressed God, men who pleased God; and out of all of the people that did something for God in history, the Bible records or pulls out about a dozen of them, and right there stuck in the middle is Samson!

Not a mention of Delilah in the New Testament, not one mention of her. Why is that? Because when the Holy Ghost looks on Samson, the Holy Ghost records he was the man who rose out of failure and setback, and trusted in the grace of God. He dared to believe that grace could come to him. He dared to believe that in the most impossible and difficult setback, where everything in his life had been stripped away from him, where his life now was in ruins, and he's no longer fulfilling his purpose, he dared to believe that God was still good, and would

help him at that moment.

It's great when life is going well, to think good of God; but you know when you're right down there, and things are in trouble, and there's pressure on you; that is when you need to know that this God we serve, is a God who loves us. He's a God of grace, and He's a God who can reach right down to you, wherever you are; and everyone's said: it's over, you're history, you've failed; and God says: I see the fire of faith in that man's heart; I can pick him up out of there, and I can cause his end to be stronger than his beginning. Now that is a great message, and Delilah's got not much to do with that. It's all about God. You've got to focus on the right things.

It says in Judges 16:4 - it says: afterwards he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, the Valley of Vines, whose name was Delilah.

Delilah means literally - it means to bring you low, to dry you up, to make you feeble - how about that? To bring you low, dry you up, make you feeble; so every person has got a Delilah, something that brings you down, makes you weak, makes you feeble. Your faith starts to falter.

It could be some little wee habit you've got in your life, it could be some area in your heart, whatever it is, the devil knows about it. I can tell you now, and he will have assignments, that will go descend a Delilah into your life.

Your Delilah is whatever you trade with, to feel better. Your Delilah could be the television, it could be the Internet, could be romance novels, it could be all kinds of things. Your Delilah is whatever you trade away your purpose and destiny, to feel a little better about yourself.

Your Delilah comes in when you feel the need of comfort, when you're feeling lonely, it comes in to offer you comfort, and it'll take away your purpose, your destiny; it'll steal your vision, it'll steal your strength, take everything away - and everyone has got one.

The question is whether you can name your one. If you can't name it, it'll be working on you all the time; and so it says here: the Philistines, Lords of the Philistines, a picture of demonic spirits or familiar spirits, came and said to her: entice him, or let's see if you can open him up, get his soul opened up, find out

where his strength lies; that we might prevail against him, or overpower him, or overcome him; and then afflict him, or put a yoke on him, and then attack him, or afflict him, or depress him; and put him down and humiliate him.

So notice the strategy of the enemy, it's very simple: send a Delilah; something into your life that looks good, feels good, makes you feel a little better about yourself; but it strips away some things from your life.

It says very simply: your Delilah is anything that you open your life up to, anything that draws you, takes you away from God said about your life. And it says: it'll overpower you, or overcome you. It says: it will bind you, or yoke and harness you; and then it'll depress you, and bring you down.

So I'm sure that you could probably already think of what it is, that whenever it happens, it gets on top of you, and it seems to somehow get around your mind and emotions, and knock you back.

Now that's your Delilah - and see, he didn't even see it coming, because she seduced him. He fell asleep on her knees; in other words, he was spiritually unaware of what was going on around him.

Many Christians live spiritually unaware of what is going on in their personal life, what is really happening around them in their atmosphere. It's very easy for us to become passive, shut down; prayer's gone, our praise has gone. We don't really have much energy and vibrancy in life, we're into a routine in our prayer time or devotional time; or it's not there are all, instead of having some vibrancy of the Holy Ghost!

And so Delilah got him to sleep, so he didn't see her, wasn't aware what was going on. You need people around you, to help you become aware what's happening in your life. We need fellowship, we need people, we need to be connected to people that can talk into our life, and say: hey, you don't seem to be yourself today. Hey, you seem to have lost your spark. Hey, how are things going?

That's what groups are for, is to get you into relationships - not so you can sit around, have a cup of tea and talk about the Bible. It's more than that. It's to stimulate you, to get on top in your personal life, and to grow. He never had

anyone like that, so he was a sitting duck, then he become a lame duck, then he become a very powerful eagle. I love it how it ends! I love how it ends! God can take a lame duck, and make him a mighty eagle.

So she caused him to fall asleep. Once he fell asleep, she nipped off the hair - the most expensive hair cut he ever had in life; and so he comes out of the hair cut, and the enemy come in around him, and the Bible says: he shook himself; saying: I'll move in the Holy Ghost like I did before - and he didn't realise the Holy Ghost wasn't on him anymore. That's the most tragic thing, isn't it?

I remember being in a men's conference one time, and I was talking to these guys the first night there, and I was picking up some of the comments people were making, and I said to the guys: I don't know which is the worst. I don't know which I feel most sad about: one, that the spiritual atmosphere is totally empty, and devoid of any move with God; or that this is something people have got so used to - that they think this okay. I said: I think I'm really stirred about that, that people have got so used to living under a spiritual atmosphere of passivity and heaviness and oppression and blah, blah, blah, that actually they think that's normal.

Blind - and so what happened to him, they took him, they got hold of him, and the first thing they took from his life was his vision, his sense of purpose - because if you have no purpose you're lost.

One of the things Jesus came for, was to connect us to purpose. So they took out his eyes. He couldn't see where he was going. He had no direction for his life. They took out his eyes.

Second thing they did is, they bound him; they put him bondage, so he was in chains, he had no strength. His strength was never in hair. His strength was in the mighty spirit of God on him; and that same Holy Ghost that's on him, is inside you and me! We can stir our spirit man any time we want - pray, move with the Holy Ghost! It's a matter of exercising your will, and your voice, and making decisions to build a strong life. We can do that any time, because the Holy Ghost that came upon him, now lives inside all of us.

Then they put him down, and they got him going round in circles, just his life became a daily grind; and this is where so many people live; they live and they

have no vision, no sense of purpose, no captivating dream. Even if they can see, they can't see that God has got something for their life; and they're in a place where they're bound and restricted by old habits, old sins; and they're going round in circles, grinding out on a day to day routine - and something inside the person feels not right.

I want you to see what Samson did, because this prayer - and this prayer is really the key to what happens; you notice his hair began to grow again. They took him out, and wanted to put him on display and humiliate him. So there was a great public gathering, and it says: there were thousands. Verse 27; the temple was full of men and women, the Lords of the Philistines there, about three thousand men and women, watching while Samson performed in front of them.

The Bible tells us that you and I are on display. It says there is a crowd of heavenly witnesses watching our life.

There are people who went before us, who ran their race, Paul and Peter, and men of every generation, watching how you're running.

There's also some other people in the arena. There are also demonic powers. There's the Lords of the Philistines, there's all those demons, and they're looking, and they're watching how you're doing too.

What they want to see is, they want to see God's man, God's woman, blind - no Holy Ghost strength - locked up and going round in circles, humiliated.

Why does the devil love to do that? Because he can't do anything to God, but if he can get the people God loves into a place of bondage and defeat, then he can say: look at your champions.

I wonder if the spirit world knows what's going on around you, whether the demons are saying: go on! Look at your champion defeated! Going round in circles, no purpose, no vision, no dream, no Holy Ghost fire. Is that the best you can do? That's what goes on in the spirit world. It's what goes on. There's other men and women saying: God, move on our behalf, move on our behalf.

So Samson's out there, and they're all humiliating him, and he's got thousands of his enemies around him; and deep inside him there's something has risen - faith

in God. Not faith in faith, but faith that God is a good God.

The Bible says, after it describes our simple condition, it says that God who is rich in mercy and His great love. His great love, that He loves, is rich in mercy. Wherever you're at, you're not past the reach of God.

So this man said, and you'll read it in those verses, he said: remember me Lord, and give me my strength one more time, and I will lay my life down for your purpose.

God heard that prayer. That's a great prayer. God, remember me, remember me - and so God remembered him.

The power of God came on him again. This is not about Samson and his defeat, and about Delilah. This is about the God that we serve, is waiting to step in on your behalf. The God we serve is the God of grace and power. He's waiting to step in on your behalf.

What activates Him is not your need. What activates Him is your faith.

Samson was listed as a man who believed God; so I'm sure that in the time that he was going round and round in circles, getting nowhere, he didn't just sit down feeling sorry for himself.

He would have taken time to meditate in the words God had spoken to him, to meditate in what God had done in the lives of others. Every day, even though it was a bad day, and he was in a bad place, he believed it's possible for God to lift him back up out of that bad place.

You see, before he was just toying around with the call of God. Before he liked the anointing, he liked the feel of power, he liked to get the victory; but you see there was an issue in his soul that had never been resolved.

It was the issue of: will I surrender to the purposes of God? So he wanted God and the other, and he got a Delilah. Then when he came to himself, he came to a place where he said: God, it's all about you, and your purpose for my life; and so he reached out: Lord, remember me, remember me. Lord, in all your goodness, remember me; remember me and strengthen me again, and I will lay my life down for your purposes.

And when God heard that cry, God responded. It's not the cry of someone who just wants: well God, I'm feeling down today. Can you come and send someone to pray for me, and bring me a prophetic word, and bless me? It's not that kind of cry. It was a cry that said: God, I have come like the prodigal son to the end of myself; and I've come to my senses and I'm coming back.

You can marry what happened there with the story of the prodigal son. When the prodigal son returned, the Father held him in his arms. The Father put on him a shimmering garment of righteousness, restored him into the throes of sonship, put a ring of authority, so he could stand again as the son. He didn't have to do anything. It's because the Father is good, the Father is loving, the Father is gracious. All it takes is for someone who'll dare to come to Him and believe.

The thing I observe about Samson is this, that in the midst of his pain, he did not become bitter. The midst of his sorrow and his mistakes, he did not become depressed and suicidal.

Instead, in the midst of it, he thought about God, and faith rose in his heart; and there came a day when he said: God, I lay my life down to serve you. Now Lord, strengthen me, remember me. I know I've blown it, I know that I'm really short of what you had, but Lord, I'm not short of your grace, your goodness.

It was never about his prayer, and never about Delilah. This story is about the goodness of God, to someone who's fallen over, fallen down. You are not beyond the reach of God, no matter where you are today.

You may be thinking: I can't see how my calling could work out. I can't see how I can get from where I am; but I tell you - you're not past the reach of God.

He's able to reach into your life, if you will let Him - but God who is rich in mercy and His great love, that's the God we serve. That's the God we've been singing about.

God is rich in mercy. All He's looking for is a heart that will be surrendered to Him, and will dare to believe that no matter where they're at, God can help.

Lord, remember me and strengthen me one more time. With that the Holy Ghost came on him. He tore down the pillars of the temple, and in his last act of

warfare against his enemies, killed more in that last act, than all his lifetime put together. His last moment was a glorious moment, a moment of great, great victory; and your next season in your life can be like that.

Is there anyone here today, first of all, who's not received Jesus Christ as their saviour? I'd love to give you an opportunity to receive Him. That would be the most important thing, would be to become a Christian, to give your life to Jesus. He loves you. He's concerned for your life. He's given His life for you. Are you here today, and want to give your life to Christ? I'd love you just to raise your hand, let me know. I'd love to pray with you, and lead you to come to know Jesus.

I wonder is there anyone here and God has been speaking to you, you feel this like Samson, that I'm in a low place; eyes been put out, lost my strength and vigour and determination, feels like I'm going round in circles. You don't have to stay there. God is a good God.

You say: but how can He do it? How can He do it? Don't try to figure out how. Put yourselves in His hands. Put your life in His hands. Let Him work with you one more time. Let Him work with you again. Let Him work to change you. Let Him work to help you grow through this difficult season, and there is a great day ahead for you. It'll be the greatest day of your life.

All of us, the best days of our life are ahead of us if we're in the hands of God. Don't assume you always are. Put yourself there today like Samson did. Don't be passive. Nothing happens to any passive person. You have to actively extend your faith.

I want you to pray this prayer with me: Father, I come boldly to you in Jesus' name. I ask that you restore my strength to me. I put my life in your hands to serve you, to become available for you. All I am and have, I put in your hands; and I ask you Lord today, as I reach out to you, to put your anointing afresh upon me, and to begin to pick up my life and walk with me afresh. Strengthen me Lord, to fulfil my course. Amen.



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