

JUDGES 16:21-31
THE GRACE OF GOD!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Judges chapter 16 as we continue our in-depth study through the book of Judges.

This morning we will finishing looking at the last Judge in the book of Judges, Samson.

And, as we have seen, here was a man who started with great potential, God had called him from his mother's womb and yet, he fell far short of all that God had for him.

We are told that at the beginning of his ministry, "**... the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him . . .**" Judges 13:25.

God was empowering Samson for the work that he was to do. Everything is great, things are moving in the right direction, and then we read, "**... Samson went down to Timnah . . .**" Judges 14:1.

Now we might not think much about that, but Timnah was in Philistine country, and that was the enemy of Israel, who had them in bondage for forty years! He should have never gone down to Timnah!

There, in this Philistine land, he "**saw a woman,**" a Philistine woman and he wanted her. I don't really believe that he loved her, but he did lust after her.

And he tells his parents who are not thrilled with the idea that Samson wants to marry this woman.

And they tell their son that he should look for a woman among the children of Israel but he refuses to listen to them and he tells them, "**Get her for me, for she pleases me well.**" Judges 14:3.

And, sadly, his parents give in to his lustful demands and they will arrange the marriage to this woman, this Philistine woman!

As Samson is going back to Timnah, not with his parents, he comes to the vineyards of Timnah.

Again, we might not think much about that, but Samson was to be a Nazarite, his life dedicated to the Lord and thus, he was not to eat grapes or drink wine, and he should have not been in this vineyard!

There, in this vineyard he encounters a lion and tears this lion to pieces, but he doesn't tell his parents what had happened.

Now, after some time, we are not told how long, the marriage is going to take place and thus, Samson heads down to Timnah once again to marry this Philistine woman.

As he is traveling, going through these vineyards there in Timnah, he finds the carcass of this dead lion and in it is a bee nest and he reaches in and takes some honey.

Again, he was a Nazarite, he was not to touch anything that was dead, and yet, he had no problem disobeying the Lord!

He even brought some honey for his parents, but he did not tell them where it came from.

At this wedding feast Samson did not have any Jewish friends, so they found thirty Philistine men to be his friends at this feast, and this feast lasted seven days with lots of drinking and partying!

And Samson, being very prideful, poses a riddle to these thirty Philistine men, "**Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet.**" Judges

14:14.

And if these men could answer this riddle, he would give them thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing!

Obviously it was impossible for them to get this riddle, so they began to pester Samson's wife and she finally tells them the answer. And They tell Samson and he realizes that the only person he has told the answer to this riddle was his wife and he is not happy. Not at all.

And he goes and kills thirty Philistine men, gathers their garments and he gives them to these thirty men at this wedding feast for answering the riddle!

And Samson is still so angry that he leaves his wedding feast without consummating his marriage and he goes home to his father's house!

Because of that, we are told, "**And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.**" Judges 14:20.

Now you may be wondering why I am going over this.

The reason is simple. I want you to see the downward progression of Samson that is going to lead to something that is very devastating in his life.

Let me continue on here and you will see how this all plays out.

Some time passes by, we don't know how long, and he goes back to Timnah to consummate his marriage!

I don't know if you feel this way, but is that the most bizarre thing you heard of? Okay, maybe not the most bizarre but it is very strange. How long was Samson away from his wife and now he shows up and wants everything to be okay? Samson was truly a man who was consumed with himself and it is seen in his actions, it is all about him!

Now when he gets to Timnah, his wife's father says that he gave her to his best man, but he has a younger daughter that he can marry!

I don't think Samson liked that idea and he is so mad that he gets 300 jackals and ties their tails together, one jackal to another, and places a lit torch between them and sends them into the grain fields of the Philistines to get back at what his wife did to him. Nothing about what he did to her, but it was all about him.

And the grain fields are destroyed, the Philistines are not happy, and they want to know who did this. And they find out it was Samson and they find out that he was married to this woman and they go and burn her father's house down with both his wife and father-in-law in it!

Even though Samson was at fault, he blames the Philistines and he goes and kills a bunch of Philistines and then goes and hides in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

Now the men of Judah are concerned because the Philistines ruled over them and they did not want Samson hiding out in their land.

So Samson says that they can turn him over to the Philistines, which they do, and Samson breaks free and kills one-thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey!

Please understand that Samson is not doing this for God, he is doing this for himself. Very sad and it is not over, not yet!

In Judges chapter 16 we see this man of God spoken of and all it says is this, "**Then Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went into her.**" Judges 16:1.

Keep in mind that this was a man of God. He was to be a Nazarite all his life, consecrated to God and yet, he is living like the Devil, letting his flesh control him instead of the Spirit of God!

Also, Gaza was a Philistine city and thus, when they found out that Samson was there, once the city was locked down at night, they were going to capture him when he tried to get out in the morning.

But Samson took the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts and he pulled them up and carried them to the top of the hill! And Samson got away!

And, if that is not enough, Samson falls in lust, not love, with another Philistine woman, her name is Delilah.

And once the Philistines find out about this relationship, they proposition her to find out the secret to Samson's strength and they would pay her very well for this information.

And we saw last time that Samson played with her, lied to her about his strength and finally, she pestered him daily and pressed him hard to get this information and finally, he just gave in and told her.

Samson said, “**... ‘No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.’**” Judges 16:17.

And she lulled him to sleep, called in the barber and he had his hair cut off and we are told, that as Samson woke up to destroy the Philistines who came to arrest him, like he had done before, but “**... he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.**” Judges 16:20.

Samson played with fire for years and now he got burned, and, as we will see, he is taken captive by the Philistines.

Now you look at the life of Samson and you may come to the conclusion that God is done with him. I mean really, God was so patient with him and now Samson has gone too far, and his sin will destroy him. God wants nothing to do with him!

But that is not true. Our God is so amazing and loving. I have called this study – ***THE GRACE OF GOD!***

And, as we have seen, as you look at the life of Samson, it is hard to imagine that God can forgive him, but He does!

I don't know where you are at this morning with your walk with the Lord. Maybe you feel that you have gone too far, that God does not love you anymore or He can't forgive you, or whatever.

I am here to tell you that if God can forgive Samson, He can forgive anyone. I hope that encourages you, not to continue in sin, but to repent before God and restore that relationship with Him because He is standing there with open arms ready to forgive!

I have broken these verses down like this,

THE BONDAGE OF SIN – JUDGES 16:21

THE REPENTANCE OF SAMSON – JUDGES 16:22

THE MOCKING OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE – JUDGES 16:23-25

THE GRACE OF GOD – JUDGES 16:26-31

So with that as our introduction, and I know it was long but I need you to understand what Samson was like, the things that he did so you understand the grace of God, let's begin reading in Judges chapter 16, beginning in verse 21, and let's see what the Lord has for us as we look at – ***THE GRACE OF GOD!***

JUDGES 16**VERSE 21**

Here was a man who was to be used by God, called to be consecrated to God from birth or a Nazarite, and now we see – ***THE BONDAGE OF SIN!***

Keep in mind that the Philistines were the perennial enemy of Israel and Samson was spending a lot of time down there, and his activity was sinful, I think we can agree on that.

And now we see that the Philistines have not only captured Samson but they put out his eyes, they blinded him!

Then also put bronze fetters on him and thus, they bound Samson so he would not escape, which would be really hard to do since he was now blinded by them, they put out his eyes!

And then, they brought him to Gaza where they put him to work, he was a slave to them, doing the work of an animal as he was grinding the wheat at the millstone. Again, that was done by a donkey or mule but there is Samson, going around and around day in and day out! He is grinding at the millstone!

Now this is important because so many Christians play with sin thinking it will not affect their lives, and it will.

I am sure that Samson never thought his sin would bring him to the place he was now at, but it did. And that is a warning to every one of us. Don't play with fire, you will get burned!

And the picture I see emerge from all of this, something I believe that God wants us to see, is that sin ***BLINDS, BINDS, and GRINDS*** us.

Let me take minute and show you what I mean and then we will look at some Scriptures regarding this.

As you get involved in sin, as you ignore the conviction of God upon your life and what you are doing, your heart becomes harder and harder and you don't see it as sin anymore. In fact, like Samson, you are blind to your sin!

Now when we think of sin we tend to think of sexual sin or murder, stealing. In other words, "***The big sins!***"

But sin is a transgression before God and it doesn't matter how small it is or how big it is, you are still transgressing what God has said.

In other words, what about forgiveness, what about slander, what about idle talk, what about . . .?

And we can make all kinds of excuses why these are not that bad, we can justify our sins, but that is a big problem. Once you start to justify your sin, where does it end? It doesn't, and like Samson, it will get worse and worse.

We need to open our eyes to sin and repent and get right with God or God will let us go down that path, but it is not good. And yes, once we repent, He is there with open arms to receive us, but sin will destroy our fellowship with God.

Not only will sin blind us but it will also bind us, entrap us, so that we struggle getting out of it!

Make no mistake about it, sin has the power to bind us and make us ineffective in our walk.

Look at Samson, he had bronze fetters applied to his hands and feet. The enemy made him immobile.

Spurgeon put it like this. He wrote,

“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.”- Prov. 5:22

THE first sentence has reference to a net, in which birds or beasts are taken. The ungodly man first of all finds sin to be a bait, and, charmed by its apparent pleasantness he indulges in it, and then he becomes entangled in its meshes so that he cannot escape. That which first attracted the sinner, afterwards detains him. Evil habits are soon formed, the soul readily becomes accustomed to evil, and then, even if the man should have lingering thoughts of better things, and form frail resolutions to amend, his iniquities hold him captive like a bird in the fowler’s snare.

You have seen the foolish fly descend into the sweet which is spread to destroy him, he sips, and sips again, and by-and-by he plunges boldly in to feast himself greedily: when satisfied, he attempts to fly, but the sweet holds him by the feet and clogs his wings; he is a victim, and the more he struggles the more surely is he held.

Even so is it with the sins of ungodly men, they are at first a tempting bait, and afterwards a snare. Having sinned, they become so bewitched with sin, that the scriptural statement is no exaggeration: ***“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”***

- <https://bit.ly/2RuIXZq>

Think about this for a minute. Do you think someone who is bound by drugs started out by saying, ***“Hey, I am going to get addicted to drugs!”*** Absolutely not!

But before long, that which they thought would bring them great joy has them in bondage!

Or what about someone who is hooked on pornography. Do you really think they went to that first website and said, *“I am so looking forward to being addicted to pornography?”*

Absolutely not!

But before long, that which they thought would bring them great joy has them in bondage!

For Samson, it was sexual sin, it was pride, that brought him down. And he thought he was in control, but he wasn't. His sin had him bound and he did not see it until it was too late!

Not only will sin blind us and bind us, but it will also grind at our lives.

You think about the person who is in bondage to sin and as a Christian, it grinds at them every single day. They go around and around and around, just like Samson and they are going nowhere because they refuse to let it go and repent before the Lord!

I am going to take just a few minutes showing you what sin does in our lives and how we need to be aware and not go down that path.

First of all, in Galatians 5:1 we are told, **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”**

With the Galatians he is speaking about the liberty they have from the Law and understanding that we are saved by grace.

And Paul does not want them to go back to the bondage of the Law but to be free in Christ.

Now we can truly apply that to any sin, because sin will place us in bondage, we will entangle ourselves in it and it will be tough to get out of it!

Also, in Titus 2:11-12 we are told, **“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”**

God brings to us this gift of salvation; it is by His grace. And here is the important thing about that. Grace does not teach us to sin, the Gospel of grace teaches Christians how to live – to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts!

May we not be drawn into the world with all its lusts because they are empty, they are passing away, they will never satisfy, only Jesus has the words of eternal life, abundant life that is found in Him! Don't place yourself in the bondage of sin but be free in Jesus!

In II Peter 2:19 we are told, **“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”**

Again, the Devil will tempt you to sin and his desire is to place you in the bondage of sin, don't listen to him, listen to the Lord who tells us, **“. . . ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. . . . Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.’”** John 8:34, 36.

This is so important for us to understand and yet, we are so easily misled by the deception that is out there and the lies of the Devil. And thus, Christians can easily become enslaved to sin – ***THE BONDAGE OF SIN!***

But here is the wonderful news, we can repent of our sin and come to saving faith and if we are saved already, we can repent of our sin and restore that fellowship with God that sin had broken! The Son has set us free and we are free indeed, don't go back to the bondage of sin!

But if we do, and this is our next point – ***THE REPENTANCE OF SAMSON!***

VERSE 22

Now you may be thinking, *“How in the world did Pastor Joe come up with the idea of Samson repenting when it only speaks of his hair growing back? Was the strength of Samson really found in the length of his hair, and as it grew longer Samson got stronger? That makes no sense! What is going on here?”*

Here’s the thing. His strength was not related to his hair growing back or the length of his hair. What this is speaking of is this.

His long, uncut hair was just a symbol, an outward symbol of the vow he had taken, the Nazirite vow.

So as Samson’s hair grew back, I believe the Holy Spirit is showing us that Samson was returning to the Lord.

We don’t know how long Samson was grinding at this millstone, but it was a period of time since his hair was growing back.

And that must have been long, hard, frustrating days for Samson. And I think he had a lot of time to reflect on his life and his relationship with the Lord.

And I truly believe that Samson finally reached a point in his life that the only place he could look was up, for he had hit rock bottom.

It was at this point that Samson recognized what he had done, and he confessed his sin before the Lord.

And I see it like this. I don’t think there was a period in Samson’s life when he was closer to the Lord than now. I think that Samson’s relationship with the Lord at this point was deeper and richer than ever before. God had his undivided attention.

Think about it. All day long he spent focusing on the Lord, drawing closer to him, worshiping him.

No longer was Samson focused on self, but on the Lord, and thus, **“The hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.”**

Remember the story of King David and his sin with Bathsheba. David was the King, he had everything and yet, he coveted that which was not his, the wife of Uriah, one of his mighty men!

And David not only coveted her, he took her, and she became pregnant. Not only that, but he has her husband, Uriah, one of David’s might men again, killed in battle and then he makes himself look good by taking Bathsheba as his wife and the people probably thought what a great King we have. Uriah is killed in battle and his poor wife, who was pregnant, they thought by her husband, our King has taken to care for. No, David sinned, committed capital punishment by having an adulterous affair and murder!

And we see that in Psalm 32, after his sin was brought into the open, and he repented of his sin, David speaks about what it was like to have this sin in his life, how it affected him. And sin will affect our lives, not might!

This is what David said in Psalm 32:3-4, **“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into drought of summer.”**

When David committed this sin, it affected his entire life. It not only affected his relationship with God, but it affected his physical well-being, his emotional well-being, his strength was taken away. David felt old, he felt weak, his life was dry and barren because the joy of the Lord was gone in his life.

And, as amazing as this is, for one-year David hid his sin or tried to hide it, but God was convicting him the whole time to draw him back!

But under the grinding of this constant conviction, David came to see his sin and repent of it. Psalm 51, also speaking of this time in David's life, we read, "**Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which you have broken may rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. . . .The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart - these O God, you will not despise.**" Psalm 51:8-9, 17.

Notice what conviction does in David's life. The conviction of God brought David to a place of brokenness and he recognized his sin and confessed it before the Lord, he repented of his sin.

Not only that but David asks God to make him holy, to cleanse him as white as snow, to restore that joy that he once had with the Lord.

David was blinded by his sin. David was bound in this sin day in and day out, it affected his life. And David's sin was grinding at his life as we have seen. But he repented and God forgave him!

Now I want you to notice this because we have such a hard time letting these things go, but I want you to see what God does, as we repent of our sin.

You see, when David acknowledged his sin, Psalm 32:5 says that the Lord, "**. . . Forgave the iniquity of My sin.**"

And the Hebrew implies that as soon as David confessed in his heart his sin, God was standing there with forgiveness.

Restoration only comes as we repent and return to the Lord. We can't lose our salvation as Christians, but we can lose that fellowship with God.

And for those who are not saved, have not asked Jesus to be Lord and Savior of their life, unless you repent of your sins and receive Jesus, your sins will keep you separated from God.

So we see here – ***THE REPENTANCE OF SAMSON!***

But let me also say this. When we, as Christians are involved in sin and the world sees it, well, what happens is that we see – ***THE MOCKING OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE!***

Let's read on and you will see what I mean.

VERSES 23-25

Here we see the Philistines throw this huge party, but why, who is this party for?

The party is because, in their mind, their god, Dagon, defeated the God of the children of Israel. So they are praising their god for this great victory and the capture of their leader, Samson!

And this is something that we need to remember and take into consideration before we do anything!

By our actions, what we do and what we say, people will come to some conclusions about our God.

For example. If we are involved in sexual sin and that sin is exposed, then unbelievers will use that to say things like, ***“Christians, they are no different than anyone else. They speak about how holy they are, but they do the same things we do. There is no God!”***

We see this played out in the life of David. Remember when David sinned with Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet called him out on his sin, exposed the sin of David. And, even though David confessed his sin, repented of his sin, we are told in II Samuel 12:14, “**However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme** . . .”

That is what we see here with these Philistines. Because of Samson’s behavior, because he was captured by the Philistines, they came to some very wrong conclusions.

They truly believed that their god, Dagon was better and stronger than the God of Israel. That would have never happened if Samson was walking with God and not moving away from God by his actions.

What about us? What do people see when we are at work, or in the neighborhood, or driving our car with the Christian bumper sticker and-so-on? You see, when you identify yourself as a Christian, people are watching and they will come to their conclusions about the God you say you serve by what you do and what you say!

Let me give you this recent example of what can happen. This was the president of Liberty University and what happened to him as he and his wife committed sin. We are told,

Many people were disappointed and surprised to see yet another Christian leader, Jerry Falwell Jr. and his wife make the news because they acted like anything but Godly people.

The head of one of the largest Christian universities in the world and his wife were exposed as hypocrites who have been privately mocking the holy God that we serve.

These are just the latest in a long line of people used by God who have gone astray. The list goes back at least as far as King David. How can this happen? What were they thinking? What are we to think?

Should we just show mercy and not talk about what they've done? God uses the story of King David as an example of the consequences of sin. His failures are recorded for the whole world to see. There are right conclusions to draw from these examples; there are also wrong ones.

There are speed limits on nearly every road in the country. Sometimes we don't understand them, and they may even seem arbitrary. Rational people realize that because drivers are often careless and reckless, limits must be imposed for everyone's safety.

Imagine that a child is a passenger in her parent's car for years and nothing bad happens. One day while driving her father becomes insanely angry, ignores the speed limit, accelerates to a hundred miles an hour, fails to make a turn and the girl is seriously injured in a terrible traffic accident. As she thinks about all the pain and suffering she endures, she concludes that speed limits are no good. She will ignore them when it's up to her because the accident proves they simply don't work.

She fails to consider the accident is the result of ignoring the speed limit. Riding in the car was safe until then. This proves that speed limits are good and are there to protect us.

Imagine a child is growing up in a Christian home for years and nothing bad happens. One day her mother becomes overwhelmed, ignores God's law about marriage, and leaves home to be with a man she met online. The child is trapped in the fallout of terrible divorce. As she contemplates all the pain and suffering she endures, she concludes that God's laws are no good. She will ignore them when it's up to her because her parents' divorce proves they simply don't work.

She fails to understand the adultery and divorce are the result of ignoring God's laws. Life was good until then. This proves that His laws are good and are there to protect us.

The kind of conclusion we see in the second scenario is all-too-common – almost typical of people who have lived through the moral failings and hypocrisy of “Christian” parents or church leaders. You may know someone who has drawn this same conclusion.

“Christian” leaders regularly make news headlines because of their moral failures. This often catches us by surprise. In the church of Jesus Christ such a thing should not happen. But people in positions of power and money often fall into sin. We should be no more surprised by those high-profile failures than the fact that all Christians face temptation and those with little or no power and money are often exposed as hypocrites as well.

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And we see that here with Samson. They are not only mocking God, but they are mocking Samson or the people of the true and living God.

We see this when big name Christians fall into sin, the news media is all over it mocking them, mocking other Christians and mocking the God we serve. They love to do that because they hate God, they don't believe in Him and thus, anything that would put Him down they are all over and they want others to join in with them and follow down their path.

Warren Wiersbe put it like this. He wrote,

The people at the religious festival called for Samson to be brought to entertain them. They were in high spirits because their enemy was now in their control and Dagon had triumphed over Jehovah.

They thought Samson's blindness rendered him harmless. They didn't know that God had deigned [consented] to forgive him and restore his strength.

In the KJV, two different words are translated “make sport” in 16:25 (“entertain” and “perform” in the NIV).

The first means to celebrate, frolic, joke, and entertain; and the second means to perform, make sport, and laugh.

We aren’t told exactly *how* Samson entertained the huge crowd in Dagon’s temple, but one thing is sure: He gave them every reason to believe he was harmless and under their control. He was even in the hands of a boy who was leading the blind man from place to place.

We’ve seen previous indications that Samson was a clever fellow with a sense of humor. Thus no doubt he gave the audience just what they wanted.

- Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – OT*, p. 466

And I think you can imagine all the noise, all the joking and mocking of Samson and the God he served that was going on. They were having a great time all because Samson’s witness was so poor, he let the flesh control his life and bring him into bondage. And because of that we see – ***THE MOCKING OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE!***

But the wonderful thing about our God is that He is gracious and merciful, and we will see that with our last point – ***THE GRACE OF GOD!***

VERSES 26-31

Once again I want you to notice how at ease the Philistines are with Samson. They have a young boy guard Samson.

But Samson is no longer going to be a natural man but a supernatural man, one who is empowered by the Spirit of God!

You see, Samson repented, and God forgave and restored him and yet, there were consequences for his actions as we have seen.

Now think about all that Samson did wrong, how sin filled his life. We looked at that as we opened up our study this morning. We spent a lot of time looking at the life of Samson and it was not good.

In saying that, how in the world could God forgive Samson?

It wasn't because he was such a great guy!

It wasn't because he did many great works!

No, it was simply grace or the unmerited favor of God. It was not that Samson deserved God's forgiveness, but it was God giving to Samson that which he did not deserve, and that is truly what grace is all about!

Some of you know who John Newton is and some of you don't. But I bet you know the song he wrote – ***AMAZING GRACE!***

Let me share this with you so you get an idea of what he was speaking of, because John was not a nice man and yet, he received the grace of God into his life and so can you. We are told,

I used to think America's favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace", was a bit overdone: ". . . that saved a wretch like me." Really now!

But the author *was* a wretch, a moral pariah. While a new believer around 1750, John Newton had commanded an English slave ship.

You know what that meant. Ships would make the first leg of their voyage from England nearly empty until they would anchor off the African coast. There tribal chiefs would deliver to the Europeans stockades full of men and women, captured in raids and wars against other tribes.

Buyers would select the finest specimens, which would be bartered for weapons, ammunition, metal, liquor, trinkets, and cloth. Then the captives would be loaded aboard, packed for sailing. They were chained below decks to prevent suicides, laid side by side to save space, row after row, one after another, until the vessel was laden with as many as 600 units of human cargo.

Captains sought a fast voyage across the Atlantic's infamous "middle passage," hoping to preserve as much of their cargo as possible, yet mortality sometimes ran 20% or higher. When an outbreak of smallpox or dysentery occurred, the stricken were cast overboard.

Once they arrived in the New World, blacks were traded for sugar and molasses to manufacture rum, which the ships would carry to England for the final leg of their "triangle trade."

Then off to Africa for yet another round. John Newton transported more than a few shiploads of the 6 million African slaves brought to the Americas in the 18th century.

At sea by the age of eleven, he was forced to enlist on a British man-of-war seven years later. Recaptured after desertion, the disgraced sailor was exchanged to the crew of a slave ship bound for Africa.

It was a book he found on board - Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* - which sowed the seeds of his conversion. When a ship nearly foundered in a storm, he gave his life to Christ.

Later he was promoted to captain of a slave ship. Commanding a slave vessel seems like a strange place to find a new Christian. But at last the inhuman aspects of the business began to pall on him, and he left the sea for good.

While working as a tide surveyor he studied for the ministry, and for the last 43 years of his life preached the gospel in Olney and London.

At 82, Newton said, *“My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”*

No wonder he understood so well grace - the completely undeserved mercy and favor of God.

Newton’s tombstone reads, *“John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.”*

But a far greater testimony outlives Newton in the most famous of the hundreds of hymns he wrote:

*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.*

*‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come.
‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

- <https://bit.ly/3mp7091>

I don’t think we understand all that there is with God’s amazing grace until we understand that we are miserable sinners, each and every one of us. We don’t deserve his grace, neither did John Newton and neither did Samson, but that is what grace is all about, unmerited favor, we don’t deserve it, not even a little and yet God extends it to us – **AMAZING GRACE!**

Several years ago, Bill Moyers, who is famous for his documentaries, did a documentary film on the hymn Amazing Grace.

And in this documentary, he included a scene from Wembley stadium in London.

Various musical groups, mostly rock bands, had gathered together in celebration of the changes in South Africa, and for some reason the promoters scheduled an opera singer, Jessye Norman, as the closing act.

Now in the film that Moyers put together the film cuts back and forth between scenes of the unruly crowd in the stadium and Jessye Norman being interviewed.

For 12 hours' groups like *Guns and Roses* blasted the crowd with banks of speakers riling up fans already high on booze and dope. The crowd yells for more curtain calls and the rock group obliges.

But meanwhile in the documentary, Jessye Norman sits in her dressing room discussing the song Amazing Grace with Bill Moyers.

The hymn was written by John Newton, he was a course, cruel slave trader. He first cried out to God during a storm at sea that was so violent that it looked like he was a goner. Newton came to see the light only gradually continuing to apply his trade even after his conversion.

He wrote the song, "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" while waiting in an African harbor for a shipment of slaves. Later though he renounced his profession, became a minister and joined William Wilberforce in the fight against slavery.

John Newton never lost sight of the depths from which he had been lifted, and that's why the words amazing grace have been so special to all of us. He wrote, "That saved a wretch like me" and if you take the time to study his life you will see how true those words were.

Well, back to the film. Jessye Norman tells Bill Moyers that Newton may have borrowed an old tune sung by the slaves themselves redeeming the song just as he had been redeemed.

Finally, the time comes for Jessye Norman to sing. A single circle of light follows her, a majestic African American woman wearing a flowing African robe she strolls on stage.

There is no back-up band, no musical instruments to accompany her – just Jessye Norman.

The crowd stirs, they're restless, a few even know who she is, the famous opera star.

A voice from the crowd yells, "More Guns and Roses!" Others began to take up the cry, the scene is getting ugly.

Alone, acapella, Jessye Norman begins to sing very slowly,

"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."

By the time Norman reaches the second verse –

"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved . . ."

The soprano has the crowd in her hands.

By the time she reaches the third verse –

"Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home"

Several thousand fans are singing along, digging far back in their lost memories for words they heard long ago

"When we've been there ten-thousand years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." A remarkable thing happens in Wembley stadium that night, seventy-thousand raucous fans fall silent before the grace of God in music."

- Source Unknown

I don't know if anyone repented of their sin and came to saving faith that night, but they are without excuse because they heard of God's amazing grace for them.

What is amazing is that they knew the words and they sang the song!

This is the amazing grace we are talking about. What God has done in our lives. He has taken these dead spiritual lives and made them alive in Christ. He has done this.

The only thing we have added to our salvation is *SIN!* That is why God became flesh, dwelt among us, went to the cross of Calvary to pay in full the penalty for our sins!

And it is not something we deserve; it is a grace gift.

And if you add anything to grace it is no longer grace, it is works and God owes you heaven.

But make no mistake about it, God does not owe us heaven, but He freely gives it to us by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

And for us as Christians, sin can break that fellowship with God but as soon as we return to Him, repent, He is there waiting for us. That truly is – *AMAZING GRACE!*

For Samson, we are told that this young lad who was leading him around, was asked by Samson to put his hands, Samson's hands on the pillars that supported the temple, and he did.

And we are told that some three thousand men and women sat on the roof watching what was taking place below.

And as Samson reached for the pillars of the temple, he cried out, “... **‘O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!’**”

And as he pressed upon the pillars of the temple they came crashing down, killing many of the Philistines.

The tragedy for Samson is that he did not live up to the potential that God had for him. We are told in Judges 16:30, “**. . . So the dead that he killed at this death were more than he had killed in his life.**”

And then his brothers and his father’s household came down to gather the body of Samson, it seems like his parents are dead at this point, they are not mentioned.

But what we see here is that in his life, Samson killed at least 1,030 Philistines, but in his death, he killed more, 3,000.

Samson had the potential of delivering the children of Israel from bondage, but instead he was in bondage to his flesh.

Because of that it caused him to fall far short of what God had planned.

But I am encouraged in that Samson did not become angry with God, nor forsake the Lord. He drew close to Him as he had many hours to spend contemplating on his life and repenting of his sin.

Samson rededicated his life to the Lord, and so this blind and broken man is used one last time to defeat the enemies of God, not in his own strength, but in the power of God.

Again, that is why I say he was not a muscle man, but an average man who was used mightily by God, empowered by God to do a great work, even here at the end of his life.

I think there is a warning here for each of us, to walk worthy of that high calling by which we have been called.

May we heed the warning that Paul gave to Timothy, “**Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.**” II Timothy 2:22.

Don't go down those paths that are going to rob you of all that God has for you. May we be able to say at the end of our life what Paul was able to say, "**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**" II Timothy 4:7-8.

Samson had great potential but came up far short, may we be all that God wants us to be for His glory.

For 20 years Samson was a Judge in Israel, but it was not till the end of his life that he truly was fruitful for the Lord! What a powerful lesson for us to close on this morning!

THE GRACE OF GOD OR GOD'S AMAZING GRACE!