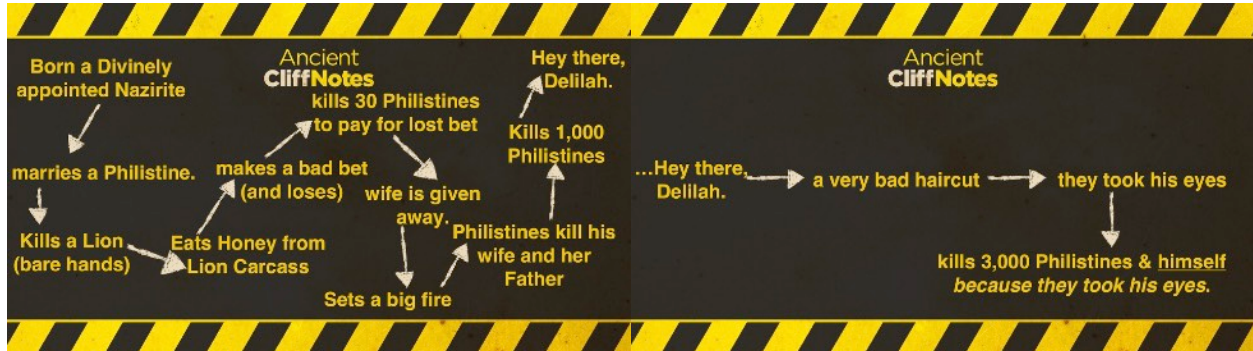


**Ancient Cliff Notes**  
**Samson**  
**Courage Church, Detroit, MI**  
**September 2, 2018**

**scriptures:** Judges 13-16, Matthew 5:7, Matthew 5:9, Psalm 23, James 2:13.



Today I am so excited to step into this series “Ancient Cliff notes”

What we are doing with this series is we are taking stories in the Bible and looking at them as a whole... so its not quite like usual where we look at one short section of scripture and we take it apart layer by layer... in this series we are still going to do that with certain elements, but the ultimate goal is to teach you the story...

understanding what happened THEN...

what it means for you NOW, and how it points to Jesus.



In most of these ancient stories there are multiple things that can be drawn out of them... lessons we can learn... on the sermons that I give I will try and focus on one big idea that sticks out to me with each one... and as you can tell because we are three weeks into it and this is the first one that I am doing... we are going to have multiple teachers working on this series... so there will be a variety of perspectives that we will get here.

Pastor Austin taught two weeks ago about Samuel, and then carried into last week talking about Saul. And the story that I am going to talk about happened at the same time in history...

Here it is on a timeline:



About 1050 B.C. Samuel anointed Saul to be King because Israel had determined that they don't want to just have judges... they want a King. So Samuel had judged Israel right up until he anointed Saul...

but at the same time there was a guy running around reeking havoc on the world in a way that very few in history have... and his name was Samson.

Samson and Samuel were Judges over Israel during the same time period... they both began in around 1076... and Samuel was a Judge until he anointed Saul, where Samson was already dead by 1051 because Samson, as we will see in a few minutes... IS CRAZY! And he did many things that should have gotten him killed but eventually something actually did.

but that is just to give you a bit of an idea on the timeline of what it was like.

The story of Samson can be found in the book of Judges chapter 13-16 and it is, to say the least... bizarre.

So we will read a few verses that set us up for the life of Samson, and then we will cliff notes through the way this all unfolds. Lets open our Bibles to Judges 13:1-5.

“And the people of Israel *again* did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord **gave them into the hand of the Philistines** for forty years. There

was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, **for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.**"

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As you see, the story starts with Samson's mom, barren. It is very similar to the story you heard two weeks ago about Samuel... Hannah was barren, and then God did a miracle.

Abraham's wife Sarah... Barren. Then God did a miracle and we have Isaac.

Isaac's wife Rebecca, Barren. But God does a miracle and... TWINS.

Jacob's wife Rachel... Barren... But God does a miracle and we get Joseph.

and there is just something about that that we can't read over too quickly. Because God is not tied down by impossible situations... and when He shows up, and He makes himself obvious... it always leads to him doing something EVEN BIGGER.

and if you are in here this morning and you are in a situation that feels like it is totally impossible... I want to encourage you that God works through the impossible situations to write the most incredible stories. The stories of redemption... of restoration... of reconciliation.

Samson's story is one that will be remembered FOREVER... it began with a miracle... and from there it was just miracle after miracle after miracle.

And the first thing that we need to make note of is that Samson was called, from before he was even born, to take the Nazirite vow.

Look at the first half of verse 5, we will look at the second half a bit at the end:

**“No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb”**

The Nazirite vow is something that you read about in Numbers 6:1-8... it means you abstain completely from drinking anything of the vine... you don't touch anything dead, at all. You don't cut your hair AT ALL during the time of the vow.

but it was VOLUNTARY, and it was limited to a certain time frame... it was more like a fast, where you say “for this amount of time I will live this specific way...”

It was called “a time of separation” in Numbers...

but in Samson's case, it wasn't limited to a time frame... it was for his entire life. And in Samson's case, it wasn't voluntary, IT WAS APPOINTED. He was called to live A LIFE OF SEPARATION.

You get a similar lifetime appointment in Luke's Gospel with John the Baptist... whose mother Elizabeth was also barren... He was a Nazirite for the duration of his life.

So Samson has a call... he has been chosen, set apart to play a huge role in the redemption that Israel so desperately needed.

So let's cliff notes through this and then we will pull out a few things that are a really big deal that we will miss if we read it too fast... That is the risk you take on when you are doing cliff notes... if you go through it too quickly you could miss one of those small details that changes everything. A lot of these teachings could be entire series'.

So Samson was appointed that he must take the Nazirite vow... and it's very obvious that he has a significant call on his life, but he really doesn't like to follow the rules... at all.

To be honest, he is a troublemaker who always gets his way and the way that he lived should not for even a moment be considered one that anyone should model their life after. In fact, more than most of the stories in the Old Testament of the men we now call “hero’s” Samson’s is a “how not to live your life”

So he grows up... and he doesn’t cut his hair but other than that he does just about everything else with total disregard for everyone but himself.

So to start, he meets a Philistine girl, and he likes her, and he tells his parents that he wants to marry her. In fact, he demands that they arrange it for him... and they ask him not to do that.

Its significant to note that the Philistines ruled over Israel at this time... the prophecy about Samson was that he would begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines...

But this is important to understand here. The Philistines didn’t rule over Israel the way that Assyria would, or the way it would happen in Babylon, or the way that Rome took over the world killing everyone who wouldn’t say “Caesar is Lord!”

The Philistines were subtle in their approach. They ruled over Israel, they controlled them... but they didn’t walk around killing people who didn’t confess their way of life or anything like that. But what they were doing was they were intermarrying, they were subtly conforming Israel to their culture, and their gods not through violence as much as some of the other empires had done and would one day do.

But culturally, the faith of the Jews was being weeded out.

But BECAUSE it wasn’t through acts of cruelty, it was not necessarily considered to be a bad thing or even a noticeable thing... you will see in a little while, Israel actually turns Samson over TO the Philistines... because he is fighting a way of life that they had grown custom to...

but historians today will actually tell you that it was under this reign that Israel was MOST at risk of extinction... even more so than the empires who were threatening to actually BRING THEM TO EXTINCTION. Because at least then, Israel supported the judges... at least then, they were willing to stand by the person who was standing UP TO THE OPPRESSOR.

But often times the things that are most dangerous in our world are the things that creep up on us... the things that enter our world subtly... and over time erode the fabric of our being... and before long we are saying things and doing things that a few years ago we would have thought were absolutely not okay... but without even realizing it our consciences and convictions can actually be shifted.

It can happen to a culture... it can happen to a person's heart. The things that persist the longest always have an affect... and if bitterness... or SINFULNESS... can creep in undetected it can bring your world down before you ever even realized what was happening.

That was what was happening to Israel, so its no surprise that Samson's parents would have not wanted Samson to marry a Philistine... because intermarriage was part of the plan... and this couple knew that their son was supposed to be a redeemer of the people... not play into the hand of the enemy.

But the Bible says this in Judges 14:4

“His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.”

So God was using it... But as you will see in a moment, it really bites Samson in the foot... so then this happens, and its really strange.

Samson is getting ready to go and talk to this girl he wants to marry, and this lion attacks him... and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson and he suddenly has like “super human strength” and he kills this lion with his bare hands.

And from there, he proceeds like it was nothing, and goes and meets the girl, and after spending a little time with her says “yup... we are getting married”

So after some days pass, he goes back to take the woman in marriage, and he passes the lion that he had killed with his bare hands. And in the body of this dead lion was a swarm of bees, and honey... and Samson just scoops out the honey and takes some with him on his journey, eating as he goes... Then he goes home, and he gives it to his parents, and they eat it... But he does not tell them where it came from.

The problem with this is that Samson was called to be a Nazirite. Part of the vow says you can't touch death.

Second problem is its disgusting, and its unclean. If you touch something unclean, like death, you are unclean. And Samson was spreading this around to people not even knowing what they were doing. And he thinks that it is funny.

So funny in fact, that when he is at a feast with many of his wife's friends... all Philistines of course... he tells a joke about it... he tells a riddle, and he issues a bet saying to 30 men that if between them they are able to figure out his riddle, then he will give ALL 30 of them a garment and a change of clothes.

But if they CAN'T figure it out, then each of them has to give him a garment and a change of clothes. All 30 of them.

So they agree to it, and this is the riddle he gives them:

“Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.”

He gives them one week to try and solve it... and after three days they can not figure it out, and they are starting to freak out because they can't really afford to lose garments... but remember... we are talking about CLOTHES.

Clothes.

Clothes.

The bet is for clothes.

and on day 4, this is what the Philistines do. They go to Samson's wife, and they say to her: tell Samson to give you the answer to the riddle... OR ELSE WE WILL BURN YOU AND YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE.

So now we are getting into arson and murder... over a bet for some clothes.

So she asks Samson the answer, and he doesn't tell her... but she keeps pushing and pushing until finally, on the 7th day... he gives in, and he tells her. And of course, she runs to her Philistine friends and gives them the answer... not necessarily because she wanted to betray her husband... but just because she didn't want her and her whole family to die.

And this is what happens. They tell Samson that they have figured it out.

"What is sweeter than honey?"

"What is stronger than a lion?"

So Samson lost the bet.

and He is furious... you can't miss this. He knows right away that his wife gave them the answer because there is no way that they could have known otherwise... so because he feels like THEY CHEATED... which they did... this is what he decided...

"I am going to pay them back for this"

and so he reasons that if he owes them all of these clothes... they aren't going to come out of his closet... these Philistines are cheaters... so he rages... and he goes into town and he kills 30 Philistines and takes their garments... in other words... to those who answered the riddle...



you may have won the riddle, but ultimately you lost... because I killed your friends to pay you what I owed you.

So what started out as a joke... no big deal at all, ends with 30 people who weren't even there or involved in any way losing their lives.

After a few days, during the wheat harvest... Samson cools down a bit and he wants to see his wife. But because of everything that had happened, his wife's Father had actually given her to another man...

This is what the Father says when Samson comes to see her, its actually really sad:

"I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion."

to put salt in an open wound... the companion spoken of here was Samson's best man.

Her Father then offers her younger sister to Samson... but Samson rejects the offer... and once again... here is this man who has been cheated out of something that matters to him... and of course, a wife matters a whole lot more than a few garments... and remember, he killed 30 people over the garments... and so this is what he does this time... He is just absolutely furious.

What he does is he goes and he CATCHES 300 foxes... and he turns the foxes so that they are tail to tail and he ties them together by their tails with a torch between them...

then he lights the torches and sends the frenzied foxes into all of the grain and the olive orchards.

Everything burns.

Now remember, the Bible specifically tells us that this is DURING THE WHEAT HARVEST. This was the one time all year when the crops

produced a harvest that would sustain that community for the entire upcoming year... and now, its all gone.

He ruined that entire cities entire harvest.

Imagine the impact that this had on this entire community.

and so of course, the Philistines say “who did this?”

“Oh, Samson did... because his Father in law gave away his wife to his best man... okay... someone has to pay.”

So they go and do what his wife was ORIGINALLY afraid of... they burn her and her Father. They kill them. To pay back Samson.

Who of course is the wrong person ever try and pay back for anything, because all it is to him is a game... a challenge... “How can I hurt you more than you hurt me?”

This is Judges 15:6-7

“And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. And Samson said to them, “If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.”

“after I do evil to the people who have done evil to me... then I will be done.”

But he doesn't act immediately this time...

It says that from there Samson goes away. He goes and stays in the Cleft of a rock... he hides out... he plots... He thinks... He simmers on his feelings...

Do you ever find yourself in a situation...

where time doesn't heal your wounds, it just breaks them open further?

where time doesn't heal your anger it just fuels it.

They say that wounds heal with time... but not so with the BITTER. Not so with the ones who live in the places that they have been hurt the deepest.

and the more time you have to reflect, the more you start to think about all the reasons that this person deserves something terrible to happen to them... and you start playing scenes over in your mind.

Sometimes, time is fuel for your fire. And you don't need time, you need help. You need to talk to someone... you need Jesus to heal you. And sometimes we just need a miracle, but when it comes to how to handle conflict, Jesus lays it out for us so clearly... because it is so important.

There is a reason that Jesus says the many things that he says about mercy. About peacemaking. He tells us peace makers shall be called sons of God... And I can't help but wonder if maybe when He says we will be called "Sons of God" - He is saying that other people, here and now will see us, and they will call us that... because its such an image of God, and what God is like... and anybody who can reflect that difficult part of his character is obviously a child of God's because peace making seems to us to be a beyond human attribute.

So people see this rare quality in someone, and of course they would say that... YOU BELONG TO GOD.

One thing that makes the beatitudes so powerful is the way that they build off of each other... being poor in spirit is first, which is salvation... the third one is meekness... when you are meek it means that you are willing to lay down your strength for the greater good... it is not a weak person, its a person who can control their strength. Samson was not meek, so of course he wouldn't have mercy (the 5th beatitude) or be a peace maker (the 7th).

If you can't show mercy yourself, how can you stand in a middle ground and make peace between others who are struggling to show it?

But they build off of each other, so by the time you get to the final one, the one where it says that you are PERSECUTED... you already are a peace

maker... so you don't fight back... because your heart has already been made pure... because you showed mercy...

I talk often of the 5th beatitude... blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. it is the only beatitude in which the person RECEIVES the exact same thing that they give... if you are merciful, you will receive mercy. If we all live by it, we create a circle of mercy... where everyone is gracious and loving, and it just keeps coming back on us because mercy circles...

But the opposite is true... in the same way mercy circles, vengeance also circles... revenge... hatred...

## JUDGMENT CIRCLES.

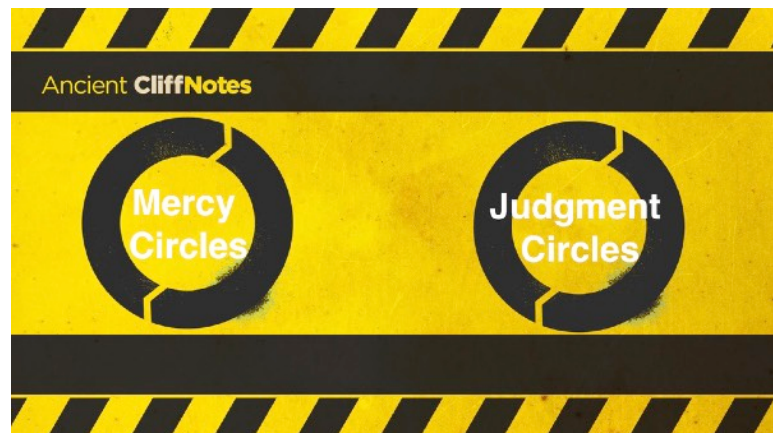
the fuel for violence... the opposite of mercy works the same way as mercy... let me show you:

The Philistine army comes to Israel... They come against them, and when Judah asks why they are getting attacked, because this was not the typical way that the Philistines were ruling over Israel... the Philistines basically tell them "we just want Samson" - thats it. And in fact, verse 10 says something significant. The Philistines tell the Israelites:

"we are just doing what he did to us"

And so then, 3,000 men of Judah... Samson's PEOPLE...

They go to Samson, and they ask to take him to the Philistines. They ask him when they are there... "Samson, why are you doing this?" "we like our lives... we have gotten comfortable back in slavery... things aren't so bad."



and do you know what he says? He doesn't say "we are slaves who need freedom" He doesn't say "they are destroying God's people"

This is what he says:

"I am just doing what they did to me."

Judgment circles. Vengeance circles. And it never ever ever ever stops.

And what Samson does is he actually goes quietly... he tells them "if you promise that YOU won't kill me, but that you will actually turn me over to the Philistines... I WILL LET YOU TAKE ME TO THEM"

and of course, to Samson, he has been plotting his revenge from the cleft of this rock... and if these men bring him to the enemy army, its likely there will be more of them in one place than any other situation he could ever go looking for... So Samson lets his own people take him and turn him over to the Philistines.

And there are thousands of Philistines there... and Samson breaks free from the ropes that he was tied in, and he finds the jawbone of a donkey and with that he attacks and kills 1,000 of the Philistines single handedly.

Retaliation.

"I am just doing what they did to me."

Matthew 5:38-39:

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

The way of Jesus says I won't allow your oppression to bring me down to YOUR LEVEL.

Jesus says "yeah, in the old days, we did to people what they did to us" - but now, we love people even when they are persecuting us. We love

people even when they are hurting us... we love people even when they have cost us more than we ever thought we would lose...

now we turn the other cheek...

The way of Samson was:

“what can I do to cause you more harm than you caused me?”

But the way of Jesus is “Father, FORGIVE THEM, because they know not what they do!”

That's the story that leads us to the story that we are all familiar with...

A man who always gets his way... who shows no-one grace... who lived opposite of everything we would later see in Jesus... a man who always has to hurt people MORE than they hurt him... he loses a bet, then kills 30 people to pay his debt... loses his wife... kills an entire economy to make someone pay for it... because SOMEONE ALWAYS HAS TO PAY!!!

Then they KILL his wife... and someone has to pay... so he kills 1,000 of their men... and everybody is after him... and the whole thing is out of control... and only after ALL OF THAT do we hear Samson start singing:

hey there Delilah.

and I know most sermons about Samson focus here, but the culmination of his life set him up for an absolutely disastrous relationship with this woman.

Samson's entire life was about himself. About what he could get... about what made him feel good... about one upping what others did to him.

So Samson falls in love with a woman named Delilah... also a Philistine. And the Philistines offer her a TON of money to help them capture Samson...

and this is just cliff notes, so we will fly through this... but she basically begs him to tell her the secret of his strength... and at first, he seems

smart... he makes something up to see what she will do. He says "bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried and I will lose my strength"

and so SHE TIES HIM WITH SEVEN FRESH BOWSTRINGS... and the Philistines prepare to attack him... and of course he breaks the bowstrings...

he outsmarted her... but she totally *out-seduced* him... because even knowing by then that she was obviously trying to destroy him... on the 4th attempt he finally tells her...

"no razor has ever been to my hair... cut my hair, and I will lose my strength and be just like every other man."

and so, when he was sleeping... that was what she did. She betrayed him, she cut his hair... she turned him over to the Philistines and he couldn't fight back... he was just like everyone else after the Spirit left him.

But watch this... this guy's story is just absolutely tragic. Its so sad that someone would actually live their entire lives like this... especially someone who had such an incredible purpose in his life... He had a destiny...

but when he finally fell, and the Philistines took his captive... they gauged out his eyes... they put him in prison... and they started saying that their god, who was NOT the God of Israel... had brought Samson into their hands.

And the Bible says that when they were all drunk at a party... they called Samson out of prison and they tied him to two pillars and they were using his as entertainment for their party...

there were 3,000 people at this party in this house... so it must have been a HUGE house. But what happens is this... Samson prays one final prayer, and look at what it is, Judges 16:28

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me *only this once*, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines **for my two eyes.**”

Even in these last moments, Samson, who at this point knows that he is going to die and he is more than happy to expedite that a little... prays this prayer that is so incredibly absurd and yet captures so perfectly the heart of unforgiveness and the world that we still to this day are living in... He doesn't say “God rescue me” - He doesn't say “God, they are mocking you and giving credit to their stupid powerless God, lets show them who the real God is”

He doesn't say “God, forgive them... they don't know what they are doing.”

He says “God, all I want... my dying wish... is to kill these people because they took my eyes... and there are 3,000 people here and that seems to me like a pretty fair request... 3,000 lives for 2 eyes.”

and so the story ends with Samson killing 3,000 Philistines, and himself, because they took his eyes.

And I can't help but wonder if maybe... just maybe... Samson could have had more. Things could have been a bit different... a guy with such a call on his life from before he was even born, yet he was so consumed with revenge and judgment that it ultimately found himself in a circle that had no way out of it.

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Lets look once more at a part of what we read at the very beginning.

The last line of the passage that we read at the very beginning, as we were setting the stage for the life story of Samson, is where I want to end.

its Judges 13:5b -

“and he shall *begin* to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”



The Philistines controlled Israel for some time... and God used the life of Samson to show Israel that they must not stay captive under this rule forever... being absorbed into a culture that was the opposite of how God called them to live... serving gods who were not real... growing content with captivity...

God used one of the most flawed characters in the entire Bible to begin something... but its interesting because the Bible says that Samson only began the work... God used Samson to show the Philistines that there is something bigger than their empire... and that eventually the tyrannical reign will come to an end.

One man single handedly ALMOST BROUGHT THE WHOLE THING DOWN.

Samson was the first one to show the Philistines... WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL GOD'S PEOPLE FOREVER. The God they serve may be more powerful than we are... after all... how else could one man win a battle against an entire army?

And the story teaches us that... that God is bigger than our biggest adversary... that he is bigger than our problems...

But the story also teaches us that an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind. A life for a life leaves everyone dead. Nobody wins in this story. It is like a Quentin Tarantino movie. Everyone dies. And in the most brutal ways possible.

and its incredibly reflective of the way that we hold things over each other even today. and it is A GREAT yet CRYPTIC LOOK AT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE KEEP LIVING THAT WAY.

its incredibly reflective of the way we allow bitterness to hold us down from being who we are supposed to be in our world.

its incredibly reflective of the heart of every person who has ever had someone do something to you that was so wrong... so painful... that you actually decide that IT IS WORTH IT TO LOSE EVERYTHING IN ORDER

TO STAY ANGRY. That it is worth it to lose everything in order that they feel a little bit of what they did to you.

BUT IT IS NOT.

Its not worth it.

The world has always been a battle field for one-upping the last person. For causing the sorts of pain that we have experienced.

That is why we want to build the Reconciliation Table. This is why it matters so much. Its not just about a Table. It is about setting a standard in our community that we are not interested in getting what we are owed... or being paid back for what we have lost.

we are interested in Reconciliation with people. With the people we have hurt. With the people we have been hurt by.

Its the only way to live.

You know, our story starts by saying Samson will BEGIN to save Israel from Israel... but that work is made complete by David... and ULTIMATELY WAS MADE DOUBLE COMPLETE IN JESUS... but when it came to the Philistines... the redemption was complete at David.

the same David who, like Samson, made many many mistakes... hurt a lot of people... and made a lot of enemies.

but ultimately at the end of it all was able to thank God, because God prepared a table for him in the presence of my enemies...

that is where we get the concept of the Reconciliation Table from... When David says that in Psalm 23 - He doesn't want to hurt his enemies... that table is to reconcile... it is to come to terms with how we can be okay... How can we live life together... its a meal covenant... a giant meal that is entered into with the agreement that "nobody is leaving here until we figure out what is dividing us, and we make it right!"

I know for me, as I get a little older... I have one thing working for me and another working against me... I am learning so much... so in theory I know more than ever why I need to forgive people who take advantage of me... who use me... who hurt me... who talk bad about me...

but on the other hand... I am experiencing so much... and its making it harder and harder... Because every time I step out to try and do something and it ends with me feeling hurt or betrayed... it makes me never want to step out again. I don't want to feel the weight of that anymore...

and if I am not careful, I will allow my experiences to cause me to make judgments about other people... judgments that I am not qualified OR CALLED to make... that is why I believe James 2:13 says that mercy triumphs over judgment.

Because something has to kill judgment... or else it gets really out of control. And just like in the way that the Philistines took over Israel... it starts small... subtle... you don't even realize that it is happening... but even as it grows... though the chasm between who you once were and who you are after judgment has taken over your life is absolutely enormous... it can happen in such a way that you don't even notice it happening... because its easy to justify anger when someone legitimately has wronged you.

Its easy to carry it when you feel cheated... Samson was cheated out of the garments... he was cheated out of his wife... it was easy for him to JUSTIFY HIMSELF.

But judgment is a circle... it will always come back on you... But Matthew 5:7 says so beautifully that mercy also is a circle... and if you live there... it always triumphs over judgment... because you will never win by hurting someone else. You will never win by having mental battles in your head against someone else.

But you will win if you love. Jesus taught us that. Just like Samson, he had a lot of people beat him... mock him... and eventually kill him. But yet the

entire time it was mercy. mercy. To the thief on the cross next to him...  
mercy. To the people hurting him... "Father forgive them" - mercy.

Straight from the mouth of the man who DID single handedly bring down  
the empire... and he did not do it through violence. He did it through love,  
and mercy... and grace.

His name is Jesus, and He wants to meet you right where you are today...

not to judge you, but to love you. To embrace your mess... and to show you  
why mercy triumphs over judgment... and why it is the pathway to life.