



# TIMBER! I'M FALLING IN LOVE

*SERIES: JUDGES CONQUERING THE IDOLS OF OUR HEARTS*

Judges 14:1–20

10th Message

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An old country western song by Patty Loveless is the perfect introduction for our study this morning:

The right time, the right place,  
The right body, the right face.  
Timber! I'm falling in love!

It started slow, it's coming fast,  
I gotta feeling, its gonna last.  
Timber! I'm falling in love!

You're so pretty, you look so sweet,  
Your love is sweeping me off my feet.  
You're the only one I'm dreaming of,  
I can't believe that I'm falling in love.

Who knows how love starts,  
I woke up with you in my heart.  
Timber! I'm falling in love!<sup>1</sup>

We are conditioned through songs, movies, and reality shows to think this is how romance and love ought to be, and that it should be this way 24/7. But as we see this morning in the life of Samson, this way of thinking is dangerous.

Samson is the last and most well known judge. He is the most gifted but most flawed. As the judges deteriorate through the book of Judges, the length of material devoted to each one increases. Samson gets the most verbiage. Last week we talked about the special and unique birth narrative in chapter 13, about how Manoah and his wife received a special visitation from an angel. Reading the birth narrative, we could have tremendous expectations for Samson. But as we turn to chapter 14, we see something else entirely.

## Samson and a Woman

**Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." (Judges 14:1–2 ESV)**

Samson is a Danite from the town of Zorah, on the border of Israel and the Philistines. Timnah is six miles southwest down the Sorek Valley. One day, Samson went down to Timnah and "saw" a woman, he wanted her for a wife, and demanded that his parents get her for him. The repetition of "went down" in the chapter and the next indicates the downhill trajectory of Samson's life. Our text is laughable and sad at the same time.

**But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes." (v 14:3)**

As a Nazirite, Samson could get married. But his parents rightly question the request. They refer to the Philistines as "uncircumcised,"

a derogatory comment. The Philistines are not part of God's covenant people and God prohibited intermarriage with the peoples of the land. Interracial marriage is not the issue, but rather assimilation into another culture that results in the worship of that culture's gods. This is the problem with marrying an unbeliever. The less demanding standard will prevail.

But Samson is insistent. The woman is *Miss Right*. This attitude touches on the theme of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). Samson is saying, like so many people, "No matter what God says, I need to live true to my conscience, my convictions. I need to do what my heart is telling me." Samson is falling in love, and that is all that matters to him.

**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. (v 14:4)**

Very interesting. The narrator provides a backdrop to the Samson story. If you recall from last week, the Philistines had ruled over Israel (or this part of Israel) for forty years, and Israel was no longer crying out to God for help. They had become complacent. They had assimilated into the Philistine culture and the worship of its gods. They no longer had a desire to live as God's covenant people. They were just fine living under the rule of the Philistines. But it wasn't fine with God.

God had other plans. He knew that, left to themselves, Israel would have ceased to exist in another generation or two. Despite the disobedience of both Israel and Samson, God was not going to let this happen. He was going to drive a wedge between the Israelites and Philistines, and Samson was going to be his unwilling tool. Here we see God's sovereignty vs. human accountability.

Samson is the antithesis of Othniel, the first and ideal judge, who married an Israelite woman named Acsah. Judges begins with Acsah but ends with Delilah, who is quite a contrast. Samson is a man dominated by his passions and senses, rather than logic. His passions of lust and anger overrule all reason and faith. He sees what he wants, and he wants it now. This sounds pretty familiar in the culture in which we live.

The lust of the eyes leads to seeing, desiring, and taking. This happens not only in the sexual area, but also with other things that we see, that look right in our eyes. This is what happened with Adam and Eve in the garden. Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes," (Gen 3:6). And like Samson, we want instant gratification. It doesn't matter if the person we are attracted to is spiritually minded, or if our credit card is maxed out. The thought of waiting for God's person to marry, or saving up enough to afford something seems ridiculous. The idea of waiting goes against the grain of our culture, as well as our American economy that is dependent on debt.

## Samson and a Lion

Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes. (vv 14:5–7)

A funny thing happened on the way to Timnah. Samson's parents capitulate and give in to Samson's wishes. At some point on the way to Timnah, they get separated. When confronted with a lion, Samson is empowered by the Spirit and demonstrates his great strength by tearing the lion to pieces with his bare hands. This is the second mention of the Spirit in the Samson story. But being in contact with a corpse would have violated Samson's Nazarite vow. The law required him to go to the tabernacle and undergo a lengthy restoration process, an 8-day ritual. But he doesn't do that, nor does he tell his parents. All he wants is *Miss Right*.

## Samson and Honey

After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went. And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion. (vv 14:8–9)

Another mistake. Samson deliberately goes to the lion and further violates his Nazarite vow. What he finds is surprising—a swarm of bees and honey. This is miraculous since normally one would expect flies and maggots. Not only did Samson scrape out the sweet honey, but he also gave some to his father and mother, thus causing them to become unclean. And again he did not tell his parents. Samson's selfishness far outweighs his care of others. But remember that God is looking for an opportunity to sow discord, and thus the miracle of honey is from him.

## Samson and a Riddle

His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him. (vv 14:10–11)

Arranging the wedding would have been Samson's father's responsibility. This is a typical seven-day wedding feast. Since it would have included wine, Samson is again violating his vow. I doubt that the 30 young men were friends. They may have been there to be guards, since Samson was an imposing figure. This group of men is a far cry from David's 30 mighty men.

And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes."

And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it."

And he said to them,

"Out of the eater came something to eat.

Out of the strong came something sweet."

And in three days they could not solve the riddle. (vv 14:12–14)

Samson and his companions agree to the bet. The riddle is simply six words and includes two paradoxes. A consumer produces food and the strong produces sweetness. Samson is betting with house money because the riddle is unknowable by anyone else. Not even his parents know the answer, because Samson didn't tell them. This is a sure bet.

On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?" And Samson's wife wept over him and said, "You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is." (vv 14:15–16)

The companions didn't want to lose the bet and so go to extreme measures. They threaten to burn Samson's wife and her father's house, the very fate she suffers in the next chapter. And they claim she is trying to impoverish them. The word "impoverish" is the word to possess/dispossess that we have encountered previously in Judges. Ironically, this is what the Israelites should have been doing—possessing the land by dispossessing the Philistines.

And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard. Then she told the riddle to her people. (vv 14:16–17)

One can imagine this dramatic scene of Samson's wife crying her eyes out continually. Her people and her self-preservation has a higher priority than Samson. Basically, she drives Samson crazy with a full court press and frustrates him to death until he finally relents. What Samson doesn't tell his parents he tells the woman. If you haven't figured it out by now, the keyword in the story is "tell."

And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,

"What is sweeter than honey?

What is stronger than a lion?"

And he said to them,

"If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle." (v 14:18)

In the answer to the riddle, honey is sweetness and the lion is strength. This corresponds to the sweetness of love and the strength of Samson. Samson had great strength, but wilts when faced with the love and affections of a woman. Love melts Samson like honey.

Samson is well aware of what has happened, that the companions have cheated. They found the answers to the test in the teacher's desk. Heifers are not normally used for plowing and not normally the way a husband would refer to his wife. A word of warning to you men. Never call your wife a cow. It won't go over very well.

And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man. (v 14:19–20)

At least Samson pays his debts. Again Samson is empowered by the Spirit but is motivated by anger and vengeance. Ashkelon is 20 miles from Timnah. He strikes down 30 Philistines and carries back the 30 changes of clothes. Then he goes home to sulk, the father assumes Samson has divorced his daughter, and she is given to another. God has his opportunity, and overrules Samson's desire to marry this Philistine woman. This begins a series of violent actions that escalate between Samson and the Philistines. The next chapter is a parallel to this chapter—just more intense.

### Remaining Distinctive

Samson has a unique beginning. He has great potential, talent, gifts, and calling. But he fritters it all away. He is not a military hero, and never leads Israel into battle. All of his accomplishments are personal and his victories private. Samson's marriage is a picture of Israel. Israel too is uniquely set apart, called, and gifted for divine service, but associates with the enemy and seeks to live among them.

As the people of God, we too are called and gifted for divine service, just like Israel. Our text this morning gives at least two exhortations and an encouragement.

The first exhortation involves remaining distinctive, not compromising or assimilating into the culture. We are called to be different, to be holy. This doesn't mean that we shut the world out, isolate ourselves, and live physically separate. It doesn't mean that we go to church every day. It means we don't spiritually intermarry with the world around us, that we don't become absorbed into the culture. It means that we guard ourselves from worshipping the idols of the world, and live in covenant faithfulness with God so that we can reflect God's character and love to the world around us.

Being a Christian isn't about being perfect. Neither is the church a museum piece. This isn't the goal. The goal is to be Christ in the world, and in order to be Christ we have to continually serve God and be aware of the foreign idols of the world around us. We can't be distinctive if we are worshipping the same idols that the world worships.

This has been the theme of our summer series—conquering the idols of our hearts and loving God with all of our hearts. Hopefully you have been thinking about the idols that you struggle against and are bringing those before the Lord this summer.

One does have to wonder about the Western Church with a capital "C." I am no expert, but it seems that assimilation with the culture has been a trend over the past few decades. And the line between the Church and the world is getting less clear. Churches exist that offer anything you want. Teaching God's Word is being abandoned in order to attract people. Perhaps this is why the church is much more alive in Africa and Asia and other parts of the world than it is in the U.S. Believers are more distinct from the culture, there. I also wonder if God will look for an opportunity to stir things up, like he did with Israel through Samson. I am not making any predictions. I just wonder.

### Controlling Desires

The second exhortation involves learning to control our passions and desires. Samson was a man ruled by his passions. We all have desires for food, drink, marriage, sex, sleep, etc. God has given us these desires. However, we are to learn self-control, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit. We are to bring our desires in line with the will of God. We are to rule over our desires rather than be ruled by

them, so that we can be other-centered. Acting on passions without regard to God's word leads to unhealthy lives and relationships. What we see in Samson is that the presence of the Spirit is not a sign of spirituality. Character is more important than Spirit. Character is what changes people's lives.

**This is why Paul writes: "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart". (2 Tim 2:22)**

**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. (Titus 2:11-14)**

**For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. (Titus 3:3-5)**

Samson's idol was women. He had a problem with lust and sex, and since there are young people in the service today I thought I would spend a moment talking about why we are to have self-control in this area.

We live in an incredibly sensual world. Sex is used to sell cars, clothes, alcohol, vacations to Vegas, and toothpaste. If you watch commercials with the sound off, you can't tell what the commercial is advertising. The clothing that women wear to the gym is alluring. Nudity is common in movies and advertisements and texting. Pornography is rampant and is on the rise for young women. We can't avoid seeing pictures and people who will tempt us. And so, since we really can't avoid it, we need clear thinking.

### A key dealing with this is 1 Thessalonians 4

**This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1 Thess 4:3-5)**

Sexual immorality is any sex outside of marriage, and marriage is defined by Scripture to be a relationship between one woman and one man. Most of you know this. But often we think that "God gave us sexual desires, I can't control them, and so why should I abstain?" The reason is so that we can learn to control these desires. And learning that control allows us to love and serve a spouse in the physical relationship rather than seeking to fulfill our own lustful desires. Learning this control before getting married will pay huge dividends in marriage.

The question is this: do you control your body, or does your body control you? If our bodies control us, we are basically controlled by selfish, lustful desires. Acting on lust results in a pattern of instant gratification. Even as married Christians, we can live with the fantasy that our sensual world paints for us. Pornography perpetuates a self-centered view of sex. If we are to truly love another then we have to learn to control our body sooner than later. As Jesus told us, if we seek our life, we lose it. We can never satisfy lust or any other selfish desire. But if we lose our life, we gain it. Sex is an act of intimacy reserved for the commitment of marriage where a man and woman give themselves to each other in an act of selfless love and experience oneness.

## Flawed Saints

If you feel a bit discouraged at this point, let me offer you an encouragement. Samson is a very flawed man, and yet God is going to use Samson's disobedience, disregard of the Law, and compromise to accomplish his will. God's plans are never stymied or thwarted. This was the case with the Jew's rejection of Jesus, to accomplish his greatest act of salvation. This is what Peter said in his first sermon:

**This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.**  
(Acts 2:23–24)

I know what it is to be like Samson. And many of you do as well. We can identify with Samson in much the same way people identified with Princess Diana. Samson was so real, so human. God doesn't condone our sin and disobedience, and there may be consequences, like there were for Samson. I just want to offer a word of encouragement to you. God loves ragamuffins and beggars, the weak, weary, and wicked; the lost, lonely, and left out. No matter where you are in life, God's Spirit can heal, redeem, and give new life. God is not done with you yet. God uses everything in our life. At times God even uses our sin, or works through the sin of another person to accomplish his will in our life.

Often the people who most reflect Christ are the people who hit bottom at some point. I often read how folks in 12-step programs are the most real and vital Christians because they are honest and vulnerable and they know they need Jesus every minute of every day. I know, for me, that I would much rather be with real people who know their brokenness than people who appear to have it all together.

In the end, Samson is going to get there, and we will too, by faith. And that is why Samson appears in Hebrew 11 along with Gideon, Jephthah, and Barak.

*Now we wait "for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." May God grant us the grace to be part of his plan" (Titus 2:11–14).*

1. Wikipedia contributors, "Timber, I'm Falling in Love." n.p. [cited August 2016] online: [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title= Timber,\\_ I%27m\\_Falling\\_in\\_Love&oldid=726344036](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Timber,_I%27m_Falling_in_Love&oldid=726344036)

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