TOYING WITH GOD'S GRACE

Thursday, November 19

Reading: Judges 16

> ***Judges 16:18*** *When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands.* ***19*** *Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.* ***20*** *Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.*

We again find Samson following his lustful eyes, this time to the house of a prostitute in Gaza. Surrounded by enemy soldiers during the night, Samson miraculously escapes by ripping off the city gates and carrying them away. However, he would never have been in danger if he was not following his carnal desires instead of following the Lord.

Now we come to the famous part of Samson's story - his affair with Delilah. Once again, Samson chooses the wrong woman but this time it will cost him everything. He has already broken two of his vows and now he toys with the last one. Delilah keeps pressing him for the secret of his strength and he keeps telling her lies. He must realize what she is up to, but he continues to play his little game. With each lie he gets closer to the truth (His third lie actually involves his hair). Finally, after much nagging and crying, Samson tells Delilah the truth about his vow never to cut his hair.

Judges 16:20 is one of the saddest verses in Scripture: "But [Samson] did not know that the Lord had left him." Samson had played around with sin for so long, he figured that breaking his vow to God didn't matter. He had taken God's blessings for granted and now ended up as a blinded slave, mocked by those with whom he had been friendly.

Samson had been spiritually blind all along. Only after he was physically blinded could he finally see that his strength was not actually in his hair, but in his relationship with God. Only at the end did he realize that the gifts of God cannot replace a relationship with God. His final prayer shows a growth in his faith (though not perfect as he still cries out for revenge). He dies doing what he should have been doing all along - depending on the God who is in control ("Sovereign Lord") to help him defeat the Lord's enemies.

LESSON ONE: Like Samson, we sometimes foolishly think that God's blessings are something we deserve and can use as we see fit instead of seeing them as gifts from God that should be used in His service. How does God want you to use the gifts and blessings He has given you?

LESSON TWO: Sometimes we too can be spiritually blind when we revel in God's blessings but ignore a personal relationship with Him. Do you have an intimate relationship with the Sovereign Lord? How can you help this relationship grow deeper?

LESSON THREE: God often must use "the school of hard knocks" to get our attention and bring us back to Himself. How have you seen God do this in your life? In the lives of other believers? We need to stop toying with God's grace and build our relationship with God - the Giver of all good things (James 1:17).