

Mass Chaos

A Study of the Book of Judges

Session 9: Samson & Delilah

Introduction

Read the following statement from Matthew Harrison, the president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, regarding the recent actions of a district president. If you were a congregation member, how would you feel? If you were a member of the public, how would you feel?

Pastoral response from President Harrison regarding reported clergy abuse in [Place]¹

January 29, 2026
reporter.lcms.org

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What I share with you today weighs heavily on me and upon our whole church. In fact, it's devastating. I'm in shock at the injury of innocent victims, and the shame brought upon our faithful people. Jesus, have mercy upon us! This afternoon, the [district president's name] appeared before a federal magistrate to hear the charges against him. He did not contest the government's motion to detain him until trial, and a grand jury hearing is expected. The press release from the U.S. Attorney's Office, [place], states that hidden camera devices were found at his residence and an additional accusation of lewd behavior with a minor was part of the criminal complaint.

As the press release noted, an accusation does not constitute proof of guilt. Our church body has an ecclesiastical process for conduct unbecoming a minister of the Gospel. These processes will be followed. The duties of the District President for the [district] have been assumed by the First Vice President [name].

If these allegations prove true, they are an unfathomable betrayal of the responsibility and trust placed in the servants of the church by Christ and His people. To commit

¹ I have removed all identifying information for our purposes here. Such identifying information was included in Harrison's press release.

sexual violence or exploitation against others, especially children, is an unconscionable sin and crime. This has no place in the church. Our Lord has strong words for all who would lead His little ones to stumble (Matt. 18:6). The LCMS will fully cooperate with civil authorities on this matter.

We know that such sins and crimes, as alleged, inflict intense pain and suffering on victims. Christ alone provides the healing, and we turn to Him. I commend those who, in any circumstance, courageously shed light on these crimes and sins. If you or a loved one have something to report in regard to this matter, please contact the FBI [place, contact information].

The LCMS [place] District has established a special resource to receive reports from any individual who may have experienced harm by [district president's name]: [contact information]. These channels are being monitored by [name], a mental health professional.

There are other pastoral matters to address as this process plays out before us, and I'll do so.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Cor. 1:3–5).

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison
President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Samson & Delilah

16:1–22

In this chapter, Samson continues to perform great feats of strength, but the phrase, “The Spirit of the LORD came upon him” (see last week), is conspicuously absent. What are the destructive ramifications of people (especially men) falling into the temptations of sex and power—both then and now?

Evaluate the ethics of Samson's response to Delilah. Is he nobly protecting his people of Israel? Is he telling a white lie? Is he blatantly lying? Is he manipulating Delilah and purposely leading her on and making fun of her? Something else?

So quickly after Samson showed us what Christ would do in the future (see last week), Samson suffers an epic fall. "He did not know that the LORD had left him" (16:20) is a sobering line.

Read the selection below from the chapter, "Dirty Secrets," in the book *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. **Discuss:** What can a congregation do to help their pastor have a healthy spiritual life publicly and privately?

He got used to the bad habits of unfaith. 'They're just my way of unwinding,' he'd tell himself. He reasoned that they didn't get in the way of what he had been called to do. He kept telling himself that he was working hard and doing well, but he wasn't doing well. He had more sleepless nights than he was ready to admit. He had gained thirty pounds over the last several years. He numbed his brain every night with hours upon hours of vacuous TV or Internet pop culture. He had incurred more debt than ever before in his life. His wife would have said that he had become increasingly irritable and distant. At home he often came across as a rather joyless, overburdened man. His kids would say that even when he was there, he was often 'not there.' He dreaded meetings and found himself easily distracted when he needed focus in order to prepare his next sermon. The door to his office was shut more now than it had been, and he delegated more of his duties to his executive pastor.

Yet no one in the congregation had a clue. He did all his public duties, and from the perspective of the person in the pew, he seemed to do them rather well. He led the meetings that he was appointed to lead and did his best to do the follow-up work that landed on his desk. The problem was that he was not doing well. There was a growing disparity between the public persona and the private man. There was a growing disconnect between the faith statements he made from up front and the thinking that ruled his heart most of the time. He carried around with him the dirty secret that many pastors carry, the one that is so hard for a 'man of faith' to admit. The dirty secret was that much of what he did was not done out of faith but out of fear.

Perhaps this is a not-too-often-shared secret of pastoral ministry; that is, how much of it is driven not by faith in the truths of the gospel and in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ but by fear.²

² Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 125–126.

Samson's Death

16:23–31

Archaeological Note: The temple complex probably had an open courtyard in the middle and a flat roof surrounding it. The thousands of people on the roof (v. 27) were watching Samson below. Based on excavations of a Philistine temple from the same time period, it seems this temple had wooden pillars that rested on stone bases on the floor, held in place simply by the weight of the roof above. This is how it seems Samson dislodged the two central pillars (v. 29).³

Samson's death is debated—was it a suicide, a final act of selfish rage, or a heroic act of deliverance? Read the two commentators below. Then agree/disagree: “Samson is a hero in how he died.”

This was Samson's moment of repentance. He was casting himself wholly upon the grace of God, the same grace with which he had once trifled. ... Having said, “It is finished,” Jesus added, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). To finish the work the Father in heaven had given him, Jesus laid down his life for the world. Samson was yielding his life in full recognition of the role his heavenly Father had given him from birth. Samson's final act was not a selfish act of self-destruction. That sin Samson had already committed by giving away the secret of his great strength to Delilah. Samson died better than he had lived. For this reason Samson belongs among the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews chapter 11.⁴

Although Samson's prayer represents a last-ditch effort to secure divine aid, most readers will welcome the fact that he is finally acknowledging the role of Yahweh [the LORD] in his life. ... An alert reader, however, will be troubled by several small but important details. First, Samson's requests are totally self-centered. In his plea for God to remember and strengthen him, he seems totally oblivious to the national emergency and unconcerned about the divine agenda he was raised up to fulfill. Second, by asking for help “just once more” Samson betrays his shortsighted vision. For Samson, each action is intended as the last one (cf. 15:7). There is no thought for Yahweh's long-range plan for himself or his people. ... Again the reader is struck by a total lack of concern for the divine agenda or the fate of Samson's people. All he seeks is personal vengeance.⁵

Conclusion

Respond: “I could never be a part of the church today. Their leaders are terrible, and they've been caught in too many scandals. My trust in religious institutions is gone.”

³ “Samson and the Temple of Dagon” in Walther Kaiser & Duane Garrett, ed., *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 375; see also the note there on 16:27.

⁴ John C. Lawrenz, *Judges, Ruth* The People's Bible (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 174.

⁵ Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth* NAC 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 468.