

UNCOVERING UNSPOKEN SECRETS **(Judges 13:25-14:20)**

Shortly before and even after my wife and I married, she believed that there was a dark secret hidden in my past, but she couldn't put her finger on it. As far as she could tell, my past was squeaky clean, but she still had that nagging feeling. I'm not quite sure what she thought I had once been—a CIA agent, a drug smuggler—I don't know.

A couple of months after we were married, we took our honeymoon. We went to Israel with a group from Emmanuel, Enid. As we were going through the security line at Will Rogers International Airport, I put my carry-on luggage through the X-ray machine. Something suspicious was seen by the TSA agent. My carry-on was removed and hand searched by one agent as I was moved to the side and patted down by another.

My wife thought, "That's it. He's a terrorist. I married a terrorist."

As it turns out, my shaving cream can was the offending item. I was above the liquid limit, and I had to surrender my shaving cream.

As far as I know, Ruth Ann is still watching me and wondering what it is that I might be hiding.

Each person here might have cause to wonder about the person sitting next to you, behind you, or in front of you. A new study claims that the average person is holding on to 13 secrets, 5 of which he or she has never told another person on planet Earth.

As we come to Judges 14, we find that the Hebrew word for *speak, say, tell* is used 14 times. A number of times, that word is preceded by *did not, could not, and have not.* There were many things in that chapter there were not spoken. Those things were kept secret.

Secret things, however, have a way of becoming known. Jesus said in Luke 8:17, "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light."

In today's text, there were things that Samson did not tell his parents and sought to keep from his fiancé. As we inspect this passage, we also discover there were some things that God was doing that was not openly known. Our goal this morning is to uncover three unspoken secrets. Let's read the last verse of Judges 13 and all of 14—Judges 13:25-14:20.

Before we uncover these unspoken secrets, let me take a few moments to offer some observations about this passage. The writer of Judges tells us far more about Samson than any of the other 11 named judges. While that is true, it also true that Samson, the last judge, accomplished far less on behalf of his people than all of those who preceded him. Samson never led troops into battle. He never enjoyed a joint military victory. Of the victories he did have, all of them were private.

Chapter 13 brings great hope and promise. God is sending a Savior who was born in a miraculous way. A special calling is placed upon his life. The last verse of chapter 13 produces great expectation in the heart of the reader. It is all downhill from there—both figuratively and literally. Look at how 14:1 begins. Look also at vv. 5, 7, 10, 19; 15:8. The trajectory of Samson's life was ever downward.

Samson was self-centered, rebellious, disrespectful, dis-honorable, ruled by his passions and pride. One commentator observed that Samson was “one who frivolously fritters away his extraordinary calling and gifts.” Instead of freeing his people from the Philistines, he marries one of them.

When the Book of Joshua ends, God’s people are engaged with the struggle of taking the land and exterminating the wicked people who lived there. When Judges begins, that is still the goal, but that goal is quickly jettisoned; it is suddenly dropped. The rest of the book chronicles what has been called the Canaanization of God’s people. Instead of conquering the people of Canaan, the people of God are conquered by them, and they are not just conquered militarily. They become just like them. Their final leader is Samson, but Samson does not lead the people. Instead, Samson is led by his own feelings. Chapter 14 begins with Samson burning with passion, and it ends with Samson burning with anger.

What happened with ancient Israel is happening in the Church. Instead of the Church Christianizing our culture, the culture has secularized the Church.

With that as background, let’s uncover three unspoken secrets.

Secret #1: The LORD Has Secret Ways of Accomplishing His Work.

This chapter beautifully portrays how Samson goes about doing his own thing, being led by his fleshly desires, ignoring God’s call upon his life; and yet, God is working behind the scenes to accomplish His purposes.

The story of Samson’s marriage would be comical if it weren’t so tragic. Samson sees a pretty girl, and he’s ready to get married. In that day, marriages were normally arranged by the parents; so, Samson looks at his parents and says, “Make it happen. She’s the one.” According to v. 3, Samson says, “She is right in my eyes.” In other words, she is Miss Right. At this point, Samson hasn’t even spoken to her, but he is ready to marry her.

Unfortunately, Manoah (Samson’s father) and his wife lacked a backbone. Instead of telling him, you are not going to marry a Philistine, they acquiesce and give in to their pouting, prodigal child. They didn’t like what he wanted to do, but they did not stop what he wanted to do.

Neither Samson nor his parents exercise godly wisdom. They should have said, “Samson, you are supposed to deliver us from the Philistines, not marry them,” but they didn’t.

Clearly, Samson sinned. He was insolent. He was self-willed. He was rebellious. Without a doubt, his parents also sinned. They were enablers. They aided and abetted Samson in doing the wrong thing. They were clearly co-dependent.

The amazing thing is what we read in v. 4. Does this mean it was God’s perfect will for Samson to marry this Philistine girl? I would say, “No!” The incredible thing is God can take our sin and still accomplish what He wants to do.

Consider the crucifixion of Jesus. Was it wrong for the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus on trumped up charges? Was it wrong for Pilate to condemn to death someone he knew to be innocent? God took the sinful actions of people to accomplish redemption. On the Day

of Pentecost, Spirit-filled Peter got up and preached. He said, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23).

In our story, God had called Samson to be a deliverer. Samson wouldn’t cooperate; so, God co-opted Samson’s sinful actions to accomplish what He wanted.

Daniel Block explained, “Yahweh is determined to shatter the status quo. Samson is His tool chosen to rile up the Philistines, and this woman offers the opportunity to make it happen.”

I like what Dale Davis wrote: “Yahweh can and will use the sinfulness or stupidity of His servants as the camouflage for bringing His secret will to pass.”

This is good news. This means that God is bigger than our blunders. God is able to take our mess-ups and mistakes and sin to move forward His mission. That should not be viewed as an encouragement to ignore God and live by our will instead of His. Rather, it should be viewed as a recognition that our God is a big, big God, and in the end, God will get His way. God doesn’t just work despite our sin. He is so big that He can work through our sin.

I wonder, do you have a child or grandchild who has made some bad decisions, decisions that broke your heart, decisions that you know were contrary to God’s will? Don’t despair. Keep praying for them, and then watch what God does to redeem that situation.

One of my favorite Bible verses is Romans 8:28. You may know that verse, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” In all things God works. That includes good things and bad things, right things and even wrong things.

This verse, however, does have a limited scope. This is a promise for those who love God. If you don’t love God, He can work through what you do for the good of others without it being for your good.

Let’s uncover a second secret.

Secret #2: We Cannot Hide Our Secret Sins from the Eyes of God.

Samson sought to hide his sinful actions from his parents. We need to remember that Samson was called by God to be a Nazarite. As a Nazarite, there were three things he was completely to avoid: whatever came from grape vines, cutting his hair, and touching dead bodies.

I imagine through the years that Samson’s parents harped on those prohibitions. “No, Sammy. You can’t have raisins. Those aren’t for you. No, Sammy, you can’t play with that dead frog.”

Samson didn’t want to be bothered with their lectures and wagging finger; so, he learned to withhold information that might occasion their objections.

Our text tells us of two times that Samson withheld information from his parents. The first is found in vv. 5-6. Why did he not tell of his encounter with the lion? I don’t think it had anything to do with the lion. The text says they came to the vineyards of Timnah.

Suddenly, Samson is no longer with his parents. They get separated. Why? Where is Samson? Maybe he goes into the vineyard because he is hungry. Maybe he eats the grapes which he should not have done. Maybe the lion is hiding in the vineyard when he attacks Samson. Rather than get into an argument, he says nothing about the incident.

The second incident follows on the heels of the first. Look at vv. 8-9. As a Nazarite, Samson was not to touch dead bodies, and includes the body of animals. Something strange is going on here. Bees would not normally inhabit a corpse. That is something flies and maggots would do. Instead of going through the rotting process, this dead lion becomes, instantly, a suitable host for a beehive.

The fingerprints of God are all over this story. He is at work. God doesn't tempt us, but He does test us. He is testing Samson. "Samson, here is a second chance to the right thing." Samson, however, fails the test. He is ruled by his appetites—his appetite for women, and his appetite for food. He is ruled by his flesh.

For obvious reasons, he fails to mention this to mom and dad. They don't need to know.

The reader knows, and the reason the reader knows is that the biblical writer knows, and the reason the biblical writer knows is that God knew, and God told the writer who told the reader. Now, everybody knows.

"Be sure," the Bible says, "your sin will find you out." God knows about our sin, and God hasn't taken a vow of silence.

One reason I know that the Bible has God for its author is that the Bible deals honestly with the sin of our heroes. If the Bible was merely a human book, it would gloss over the infidelities and failings of people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, Paul, and so many others. Instead, we see them at their best and their worst.

Did you ever a hide report card or a poor test score from your parents? You might have succeeded in doing that, but God is going to administer some tests to you along the way. He will be watching. In fact, He will grade the tests. You won't get a letter grade; it is a pass/fail exam.

We come to the final secret I want us to examine.

Secret #3: The Secret Power of God's People Is His Spirit.

Ask just about anybody what the secret of Samson's strength was, and they will answer, "His hair." And I believe they would be incorrect. The secret of Samson's strength was not his hair. His hair was a sign of his strength; it was not the source of his strength.

We saw in vv. 5-6 that when the lion came rushing toward him, the Spirit of YHWH rushed upon him. Fortunately, for Samson, but sadly for the lion, the Spirit got to Samson first. In v. 19, the Spirit of YHWH rushes upon Samson, and he proceeds to kill 30 Philistines so that he can make good on the wager he lost. He has to provide 30 changes of clothes to the 30 men who were at his stag party because they solved Samson's riddle only after putting pressure on his wife to pry the answer out of Samson and to pass it along to them.

When Samson lost his power, it had was not because he got a buzz cut, it was because YHWH had left him, we are told in 16:20. Allowing his hair to be cut was the last Nazirite vow that Samson had not broken.

Samson may have thought he was invincible. He had eaten and drunk the fruit of the vine, and he was still strong. He had touched numerous dead bodies, and he was still strong. “So what if I get my hair cut, I will still be strong,” he must have thought. He did not know the Lord had left Him.

In the OT, God’s Spirit would come and go. He would come upon people and enable them to do God’s will. God’s mode of operation changed in the NT. Now, God’s Spirit does not come upon people. He comes to live inside people. He doesn’t come and go. He comes to stay. Believers are indwelt with the equipping power and continuing presence of God’s Spirit.

I want to turn your attention to a NT passage to illustrate the necessity of God’s presence in our lives. Look at the words of Jesus in John 15:1-5. In this passage we see a progression from no fruit, to fruit, to more fruit, and finally to much fruit.

In Jesus’ day, vineyards were abundant in Israel. What wheat fields are to Oklahoma, vineyards were to Israel. Jesus used an illustration the people could grasp. Jesus compared Himself to a vine. He said, “I am the vine.” He compared His Father to the Gardener, the One who cares for the vineyard. Jesus said we are the branches. If we are to bear fruit, we have to be connected to the Vine. It is by being in the Vine that we get the nutrients and power to bear fruit. Jesus warned, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.”

In the backyard of the parsonage, there is a pecan tree. When storms come and break limbs out of the tree, those limbs die, and they are unable to bear pecans. Only branches that are connected to the tree can grow pecans.

So it is with grape vines. The branch has to be in a living relationship with the Vine to be fruitful.

What did Jesus mean by *nothing*? It just so happens that people who have no relationship with Jesus whatsoever can do lots of things without Him.

- They can raise a family, hold down a job, and make a lot of money without being connected to the Vine.
- Many unbelievers have written best-selling books, made block-buster motion pictures, given award-winning performances.
- Atheistic scientists can make groundbreaking discoveries.
- Doctors who don’t know the Lord can save lives.
- Lost politicians can win elections and even serve their constituents with distinction.
- Some can even preach sermons and grow churches without being closely connected to the Vine.

What does Jesus mean by *nothing*? He was talking about growing fruit that honors God. There is a difference between growing fruit and being successful in worldly pursuits.

According to Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith, it is impossible to please [God].” God-honoring fruit is only grown in the lives of those who draw close to Jesus.

Most people envision Samson as being a stocky, muscle-bound man. I’m not so sure that was the case. If Samson had looked like a Jewish Arnold Schwarzenegger in his prime, I don’t think people would have wondered where he got his strength. It would have been obvious.

What if Samson had looked like me? What if he had thin arms and a potbelly? That would have made people scratch their heads, shrug their shoulders, and wonder, “What’s going on here?”

Our ability to serve God well comes not from natural ability. It comes from a supernatural source. We read in Zechariah 4:6, “This is the word of YHWH to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says YHWH of hosts.”

We get to decide whether God’s strength in us will be muted or magnified. We mute God’s power in our life through disobedience, but God magnifies His strength in those who listen to Him and obey Him.

When God empowers you, others will be able to tell.

What is your life saying? You can’t keep the testimony of your life a secret.