

Whatever A Man Sows, This He Will Also Reap

Series: If it Feels Good, Do It! (?)

by Ron R. Ritchie

As I was reading chapter 15 of the Book of Judges this week, I was reminded of the verse in Galatians 7, "whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." I recalled that just about a year ago I had a call from my son one afternoon, and he said, "Dad, I'm down at the wrecking yard. I just had a wreck with my truck." It was the first time he had ever gotten into this kind of jam. As I got in my car I was trying to think how to react. How do you react in this type of situation? I had never gone through this kind of an experience before. So I showed up, thinking it was just a little scratch, but the front and right side were seriously damaged--it was quite extensive, some thousand dollars worth of damage.

I said, "What happened?" He said, "Well, the police officer came already. My buddy stopped his car to pick up a friend coming down the driveway to the school, where he shouldn't have stopped. I was going normally; I couldn't stop in time so I rear-ended him." We had two cars really messed up. The father of the other boy called me and said, "My son told me he had a wreck. I would appreciate it if we could clear this up right away." I said, "Fine, I'll give it to my insurance company. No problems, don't worry about it." He called back a week later and said, "What about the insurance company?" I said, "I'll call them." I did. They said they would call him. Then I found out that it was a "Mexican standoff." Both boys were ticketed; both boys were wrong, so now it was a matter of who would outlast whom in the two insurance companies. I thought, "Fine, that's over. I'll just not worry about it."

Well, about three months went by, and one Saturday morning there's a guy standing at my front door. He asks me, "Are you Mr. Ritchie?" I said, "Yes," and he goes plop, and he hits me with this envelope. He said, "This is a summons. You are being sued by the father of the boy your son rear-ended three months ago." Because the car was in my name I was being sued.

Now I don't know about you, but I don't get those envelopes every day. I opened it, and inside there were three pages of very professional--looking charges. It was frightening. I read them. I was shaking. I thought, "I'll get that guy. I know how to handle these guys. I'm going over and to deck him. And I'm gonna . . . No, I'll have my kids go over and burn his car up. That's what I'll do." The anger just seethed up inside. I called a couple guys to ask, "How can we get back at him?" I wanted to find out where he lived. I was going to get on the phone and I was going to tell him, "You don't mess with Ritchie." I was angry. I was upset. Then I got frightened. I was churning this thing over. You can imagine: 48 hours, all day Saturday and all day Sunday, this knot in my stomach--how to get even. Finally, somebody said, "You ought to call your insurance company." I said, "Why?" "I think they will handle it." I said, "I don't know, man. I don't know what to do."

Well, I left my house at 7 a.m. Monday and drove to the insurance company in Palo Alto. (I was at the door when he was putting the key in!) I said, "Hi, Don. I've got to talk to you. I'm being sued." He said, "No kidding. Let me see." He took the papers, sat down and read them, and said, "No sweat. I'll handle it." I couldn't believe it. "What do you mean 'No sweat! I'll handle it'?" I just spent 48 hours going through some of the highest emotions of my life. I had this whole thing going on how to really get revenge without anybody knowing it. I've got a whole new plot worked out." He said, "Oh, no, they've got to sue you because you own the car, but it's really between the two insurance companies." I thought, "Nuts. You mean 48 hours of my life were totally wasted because I didn't know the truth?" As I walked away I thought, "How great that I didn't take matters into my own hands. How thankful I am that I didn't do that."

That is what this passage from Galatians (which we read this morning), is all about:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.

. . . Life as it was intended to be lived. Now in Judges 15 we are going to find that Samson experiences both sides of this coin. He sows to the flesh and he reaps corruption; he sows to the Spirit and he reaps eternal life.

1. Samson Sows The Seed Of Personal Revenge Judges 15:1-13

In verses 1-13 of this chapter we'll see that Samson sows the seed of personal revenge, and we are going to see that he reaps the loss of his wife, the loss of his authority, and the loss of his people.

Samson was set aside by God to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines, who ruled over them because the Israelites were forsaking the Lord by serving the Baals and intermarrying with the Philistines. This was the discipline of God. But God in his grace was going to move them out of that captivity. Our delivering judge, however, started his ministry by sowing seed in the flesh. What did he do? He chose a Philistine woman to marry, exactly what the Lord asked him not to do, and then he deceived his parents by offering them honey out of the carcass of the lion. Following that, he got into more deception by playing the game with the riddle, a bet he knew he could win. (I always ask myself, "Where did a Nazirite get 30 suits when I'm lucky to have one for a whole year?") Then we saw that he started a quarrel in the camp, and the Philistines made threatening overtures to his wife. They said, "Well, if you don't give us the answer to the riddle, we'll burn you alive." Did that ever produce the answer! (She cried in her tent for seven days before she got it from him.) Following that, in a fit of rage, Samson went down to Ashkelon and killed the thirty Philistines.

Now three or four months later, the scene opens and Samson is walking back to his father--in--law's house. He doesn't know that his wife is no longer his wife. His father--in--law gave her away to Samson's best friend, because, after all, Samson killed the thirty Philistines, came back and threw the suits at the Philistines to fulfill the bet; then went home and never told anybody what he was going to do. He was so angry nobody could talk to him; he left no news of what to do, so the father just said to her, "Well, I guess you just lost your husband," and gave her to Samson's best friend. So here we go, chapter 15:

1. He Reaps The Loss Of His Wife 15:1-3

But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it came about that Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said. "I will go in to my wife in her room." But her father did not let him enter. And her father said, "I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead." Samson then bald to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm."

It's now June or July, a very hot season, time for the harvest, and Samson gets up one morning and says, "It's been three or four months. I've cooled down now, so I'll go see my wife." So he walks out, grabs a little goat (like a box of chocolates) and goes down to see his wife with this wiggling box of chocolates under his arm. He is just going to say, "Hi, how are ye? I'm sorry about those thirty Philistines. I do have a temper, but maybe you'll get used to living with that." So he walks in to get his wife just like nothing has happened. (We husbands have a way of doing that.) But her father says, "Hold it. That's not your wife. Don't mess with that heifer. She's somebody else's now. Stay away from her because I've given her to your best friend. I thought that you hated her intensely. After all, she deceived you; she told the riddle to your companions; she made your whole wedding feast miserable by crying for seven days. So why would you want her? She has a younger sister; take her and it will be all over. No problems. Nothing lost. What are wives anyway?"

Samson reacts very strangely. He says, "You know what? This time I am going to do something to the Philistines where I will not be blamed. Now it's true that I killed thirty of them, it's true that they know about it, and it's true that they've a case against me, but this time I'm going to set up such a plan that they'll never find out who did it." I'm intrigued by the fact that though Samson knew that God had said, "Vengeance is mine," he knew that from Deuteronomy, yet he decided to take on the whole nation of the Philistines. Isn't that interesting? He had a quarrel with his father--in--law and his wife, so now he's going to attack the Philistines

because of this. Now the problem with this is not that he wasn't beginning to deliver Israel from the Philistines. The problem at this point is that he is sowing seed to his flesh and he is reaping, one, the loss of his wife (in chapter 14), and two, now he is about to lose his authority.

Look at the next section, verses 4-8:

2. He Reaps The Loss Of His Authority 15:4-8

And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail, and put one torch in the middle between two tails. When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves. Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son--in--law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. And Samson said to them, "Since you act like this. I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit." [Sounds like something right out of our lives doesn't it?] And he struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam. [where the hawks live.]

Now first, I don't think they were foxes. Foxes travel alone, so Samson would have had to spend nine years getting 300 of them together. I think they were jackals, which travel in packs, so he could have gotten a pack of them in a very short time. Then he takes two of them, ties their tails together, puts tar on the tails, lines up 150 pairs of them, and lights each of the tails and sends them off into the grain fields, right at harvest time. (You can imagine the letter he got from the humane society the next week!) But look what it says next. "Who did this?" not, "How did this happen?" but the personal pronoun, "who." It was too well done. Now what I love is the answer: "Why, Samson did it. That's just like Samson." Remember what he said, "I will do this this time so they will hold me blameless." Well, it didn't work. It ends with everybody in the Philistine camp knowing that Samson was out to destroy them, so they're very upset. The word is out. It is out faster than foxes can run, just like the passage in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus said,

"But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."

There are no secrets. I use to think there were. Someone taught me a long time ago that if you knew something that was a secret it could remain a secret, but I've discovered in walking among you, as you have walked with me, that there is something within us, by God's hand, that will not let us keep a secret. You know, if someone says to you, "I've got something I need to tell you, but please don't tell anybody because it's a secret," well, you just blew that right away. Right? What makes you want to tell somebody? Then you no sooner have told somebody than that somebody is sitting there with this secret, going, "Hi, I've got a secret." It's an ego thing. He gives you the feeling of, "Boy, if you just knew what I know . . . and if you're really good I might tell you, but nobody else." If he does tell you, then of course you'll tell her and she'll tell her and she'll tell him and the story comes back faster than 300 fiery jackals. You can't believe how "secrets" get out. Remember what the Lord said, "Everything that goes in must come out." It would be a great principle of life to train yourself to ask the Spirit to let you say nothing that you don't want to come back, because it will come back.

"Who did it?" ask the Philistines. "Samson" is the answer. So they burned the wife and the father. "OK," says Samson, 'since you acted like this, I'm going to get even.' Personal revenge again. He didn't say, "I'm really the one at fault. Had I never left my father's house to get a Philistine woman and gone to the party and made the bet and created the quarrel and had the fit of rage and killed the thirty Philistines and tied the foxes we wouldn't be in this predicament." What he did say was, "You burned my ex father--in--law and my ex--wife, now I'll get you." Do you see how it builds? When we are wrong, looking for personal vengeance, we forget the initial cause. We forget that maybe it was our fault the whole time. We don't like to think it's our fault. We don't want to take the blame, and here we see that Samson is just like us. He struggles to get even, to justify his own actions Then he says, "But after this. I'll quit." Well, when you read chapter 16 you're going to see

that these words don't count at all. Quit? He really gets clever in chapter 16. He gets in more trouble than you could shake a stick at. "After this I'll quit." What an arrogant statement from the flesh! Isn't that so? "If I could just do this now. One more hate letter in the mail and then I'm finished." But because you're so used to writing your address on the back of the envelope you send this anonymous hate letter with your name and address on it! Then they respond, and you say, "You, I'll show you this time." Then they say, "I'll send a letter with a bomb in it, and then I'm going to quit. "

Well, because Samson sows the seed of personal revenge, he loses his wife, now he loses his authority, and he ends up living in the cleft of a rock in Judah, where only the hawks land. The judge, the man who could lead Israel into newness of life, the man who was designed by God to set Israel free, designed by God to honor his name and to even have the Philistines honor the name of Jehovah is hiding in a rock, in fear, alone.

Now we see that not only does Samson plant the seeds of personal revenge and reap the harvest of losing his wife and the harvest of losing his authority, but then he reaps the harvest of losing his people. Look at the next section, verses 9-11:

3. He Reaps The Loss Of His People 15:9-13

Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, [they were down by the Mediterranean Sea, and now they are moving up some 28 or 29 miles] and spread out in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us? ' [We've been good.] And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us." [We're going to burn him alive. He burned our fields; we'll show him what fire can do.] Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, [We're behind you Here's your army, and we've got all the weapons. Let's go, like the days of Joshua, the days of Deborah, and the days of Gideon . . . No, it doesn't quite say that, does it?] Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." [Why are you yelling at me? They killed my wife and my father-in-law, so I just did it. Seed!]

And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me." So they said to him, "No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill your' Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

The tragedy here is that the Israelites didn't see how deep into sin they were and how they hadn't trusted the Lord. "Don't you know, Samson, that the Philistines are ruling over us? And look what you've done to us. You're making life really difficult. Our ship in the sea of the Philistines is rocking. We discovered you're not a judge, you're a menace." Sin does that to us. It holds us captive; it binds us and we can't move. We're just strapped when we could have been men and women of God. We decide to get involved with sin, to get involved with personal revenge, to get involved in settling scores, to waste all our energy in making our case versus everybody else and we're suddenly caught and bound so we can't move. When the enemy comes we're helpless_no strength, no power, no courage, nothing! We discover that the principle is clear that, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap, for the one who sows to his own flesh shall reap corruption." "As they have done to me, so I have done to them. Not a war, but personal revenge."

When I was about 18 years old I had a personal revenge battle going on with a 6'4" housekeeper in an orphanage where I was living. I'm not sure any more who started it. (Now that I'm a Christian I can see that I started it, but back when I wasn't a Christian I was convinced he started it.) So I did all kinds of things to set him up and get him in trouble. It was a really tight, legalistic orphanage, so I slipped a six-pack of beer in his refrigerator and then called the superintendent to say he was drinking beer. It was wonderful. I was so pleased. Later (like, a half-hour later) he found out that I did it. Next thing I know I'm getting rapped with the bamboo pole. So I said, "OK. I'm going to get you." One day he was walking past the dining room and I came running out with everything I had and just decked him so bad and then ran (for weeks, it seemed like) into the woods. Then he got back at me. He restricted me and beat me. So I went up to his house one night

with a gun. I was going to kill him. After all, look what he had done to me. I'm only doing what he did to me. I grabbed the door to open it but it was locked. I couldn't believe it. I wanted to kill this guy but the door was locked. I was so intent on killing him I couldn't figure out how to get in. So I just went out and sat in the middle of a baseball field and cried my heart out because I couldn't kill this guy. When I think back, what would my life have been had I opened that door? I just wonder. What was God doing that I couldn't get the door open? At 18 that would have been premeditated murder! (Twenty years later I met him in San Francisco and we hugged, as brothers in Christ.) What a man SOWS he reaps.

But now there's a change. Samson sows the spirit of faith in the Lord (verses 14-20), and everything starts to change. The coin now flips. What a sight this must have been. Samson is tied, he can't move, all the Philistines below, all the people from Judah behind him, his own people turning him over to the enemy. He has no hope, no strength nothing. I'm sure he was afraid. I'm reading a little between the lines here, but I think at this moment he said a quiet prayer. probably one of the shortest prayers he had ever prayed, like, "Dear Lord, help! I'm in big trouble. This is no way for a judge to deliver his people." But verse 14 says that he sowed the seed of faith in the Lord, and he reaped the seed of strength in the Lord.

2. Samson Sows The Seed Of Faith In The Lord 15: 14-20

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

What a sight that had to be! Samson learned a principle here that God had been trying to teach him. This is the third time the Spirit has come upon him, the third time the Lord has bailed him out.

1. He Reaps The Strength Of The Lord 15:14

Here he's standing with the Spirit of the Living God upon him, he's filled with strength, and for the first time now he is adequate for the task that lies ahead. All the haunting verses you have heard over and over keep ringing in your mind, don't they? "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy [our strength, whatever we need to face whatever life brings to us] is from God." (2 Cor. 3:5) "Indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." (2 Cor. 1:9) "We have this treasure [Christ] in earthen vessels, [what for?] that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves." (2 Cor. 4:7) We were created to house the living God. Samson had formerly chosen to face life in his own strength, and he kept planting seeds in his sinful nature and reaping all the corruption that that brings. Now the Spirit comes upon him and he's set free from all the bondage. Free to do what? Free to really begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

And what does he do? Verse 14:

2. He Reaps Victory Over His Enemies 15:14-17

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men." And it came about when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and he named that place Ramath-lehi.

I just happen to have this jawbone of an ass on my desk. I tried this a little bit. I went around swinging it to see how long I could keep my strength going, but after a while, a very short time actually, I got very tired. This is a heavy jawbone, yet Samson was able to pick up one like this and kill as many people as are in this auditorium, with the strength of the Lord. Can you imagine him running to and fro killing Philistines? Boy, if I wrapped that around your head, you'd have a headache that wouldn't quit! Look at this. Can you hold that thing up? Feel this; feel how heavy it is. Can you imagine killing 1,000 of the enemy with this? Wouldn't you

much rather have an M-1 rifle? Would you want the Lord to ask you to wipe out the enemy with that? You'd really be tired, wouldn't you? And that's the whole point: Samson couldn't kill 1,000 of the enemy with that, but the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. Now you know that Judges 3:2 says that God had to teach Israel war, so when Samson picked up the jawbone he was learning war like Joshua learned war at Jericho, and he was learning war like Deborah learned war at Mount Tabor, and he was learning war like Gideon learned war on the plains from the spring of Harod--all those strange ways that God has of ridding the land of the enemy. Samson didn't have a Philistine chariot with iron weapons and blades coming out of the wheels that cut down everybody as he ran through them. He chased the Philistines up and down the field swinging the jawbone of an ass. They would run in clusters and he would hit them on the back of the head and they'd just fall in heaps; and then he would chase another group. (He's good at chasing. He just caught all those jackals, so he's in shape!) Then he cries out with a poem. I can't imagine myself killing 1,000 men and doing that, but Samson is capable of it.

**"With the jawbone of a donkey,
Heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of a donkey
I have killed a thousand men. "**

He knows what's going on now; he knows it's the Spirit of God. Here he has sown the seeds of faith in the Lord and has reaped victory over his enemies; now he sows the seed of faith in the Lord (verses 18 through 20) and he reaps renewed strength.

3. He Reaps Renewed Strength 15:18-20

Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the Lord and said, '&Thou hast given this great deliverance by the hand of Thy servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?' But Cod split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore, he named it En-hakkore [The spring of him who calls], which is in Lehi to this day. So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

He learned to call upon Cod. First of all, he learned who he was--a servant. He learned that deliverance from the Philistines came from Cod, and he learned that he couldn't fight them in his own strength, that he needed to trust God for everything. He illustrates this because, after this incredible slaughter of the enemy, he calls on God, the God of all the universe, for a simple glass of water. He says, "Lord, it's been quite a battle. I'm dying of thirst, but I can't afford to die here because if they see me dead with the jawbone in my hand then they'll think that you're not the Cod that you really are. Your name is at stake, so revive me and give me back my ministry." When Samson sowed personal revenge he reaped the loss of his wife, the loss of his authority and the loss of his people. But when he sowed the seed of faith in the Lord then we discover that he reaped the strength of the Lord; he reaped the victory over his enemies, and he reaped renewed strength to judge Israel for twenty years.

It's your choice, it's my choice: "Do not deceive yourselves. No one makes a fool of the Lord. A man will reap exactly what he sows. If he plants in the field of his natural desires, from it he will gather the harvest of death. If he plants in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit he will gather the harvest of eternal life."

Our Heavenly Father, thank you so much for teaching us truth through Samson. We ask you now to remind us of this truth so we can be set free this week from the Philistines, our flesh, and that nothing will bind us this week, that we will totally depend upon you to meet all our needs and we won't in any way seek to justify ourselves, or get our rights, or to claim our needs, but simply be your servants. As Samson finally said, "I know you have given this deliverance to your servant, now give me the water to drink." So I'll trust you for that, that you'll give us all water to drink this week and revive us and strengthen us for the next battle. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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