

Lay Down the Jawbone March 24, 2019

Guys, when someone cuts you off on the road,
What's your first instinct?
Anyone who's ever been divorced,
When you find out your ex has trash talked you behind your back,
what's your first instinct?
When someone posts something inflammatory (in your opinion) on Facebook,
what's your first instinct?
(Unfriending them is probably your nicest instinct.)
When someone is rude to you?
You get the idea.

We are hardwired to retaliate when we are wronged.
Our instincts is to fight back,

No one's going to treat me that way and get away with it.
I'll show them.
They just picked on the wrong person.
I need to teach them a lesson they won't forget.
Listen, they have it coming.
I don't hit first, but I hit back.

It's called revenge,
and it promises to be very satisfying!

Our story today beings in the Old Testament, in the book of Judges.
You've all heard of the strongman Samson.

As we read this story, I want you to think of one of the first video games,
which was undoubtedly before your time, but not mine.

It was called PONG

VIDEO (only about 20 seconds, I'll signal the shut off.)

1 Keep PONG in mind as we listen to the story of
Samson and the Jawbone.



Judges 14-16

14 Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman.² When he returned, he said to his father and mother, “I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.”

His parents objected; but he insisted

“Get her for me. She’s the right one for me.”

So they set out together to make arrangements.

Suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. ⁶ The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. ...

⁸ Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. ⁹ He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along.

As was the custom, Samson held a seven-day feast for the thirty men who had been chosen to be his companions.

¹² “Let me tell you a riddle,” Samson said to them.

“If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.

¹³ If you can’t tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.”

“Tell us your riddle,” they said. “Let’s hear it.”

¹⁴ He replied,

“Out of the eater, something to eat;
out of the strong, something sweet.”

For three days they could not give the answer.

¹⁵ On the fourth day, they said to Samson’s wife,

“Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us,
or we will burn you and your father’s household to death.

Did you invite us here to steal our property?”

¹⁶ Then Samson’s wife threw herself on him, sobbing, “You hate me! You don’t really love me. You’ve given my people a riddle, but you haven’t told me the answer.”

... ¹⁷ She cried the whole seven days of the feast.

So on the seventh day he finally told her and she in turn explained the riddle to her people.

¹⁸ Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him,

“What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?”

Samson said to them,

“If you had not plowed with my heifer,
you would not have solved my riddle.”

PONG

¹⁹ Then the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him.

He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle.

PONG

Burning with anger, he returned to his father’s home.

²⁰ But Samson’s wife was given to one of his companions who had attended him at the feast.

PONG

CHAPTER 15

Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. He said, “I’m going to my wife’s room.”

But her father would not let him go in.

² “I was so sure you hated her,” he said, “that I gave her to your companion. Isn’t her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead.”

PONG

³ Samson said to them,

“This time I have a *right* to get even with the Philistines;
I will really harm them.”

⁴ So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails, ⁵ lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.

PONG

⁶ When the Philistines asked, “Who did this?” they were told,

“Samson, because his wife was given to his companion.”

So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death.

PONG (big pong!)

⁷ Samson said to them, “Since you’ve acted like this,
I swear that I won’t stop until I get my revenge on you.”
⁸ He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them.

PONG

Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

⁹ The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi.

¹⁰ The people of Judah asked, “Why have you come to fight us?”

“We have come to take Samson prisoner,” they answered,
“to do to him as he did to us.”

¹¹ Then three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and
said to Samson, “Don’t you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us?
What have you done to us?”

He answered, “I merely did to them what they did to me.”

The people are scared to death, so they tie up Samson to turn him over to the Philistines.

But, the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him.

The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands.

¹⁵ Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.

...**PONG**

Then we get to the part of the story you have all heard about.

Samson and Delilah.

Delilah tricks him into telling her the secret of his strength,

Which was his hair that had never been cut.

Important because it was the symbol of a special covenant relationship
he had with God as a Nazarite.

So while he is sleeping, Delilah cuts his hair, and then yells,

²⁰ “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.

²¹ Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza.

Binding **him** with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.

PONG

²But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

The story ends at a grand party of the Philistines,
Where Samson is called out of his prison for entertainment.
He asked to be placed between the two great pillars on the front portico
that held up the building,
and in one final act of revenge,
he pushes the pillars apart
the building collapses and they all go down to the grave together.

**PONG
GAME OVER – EVERYONE IS DEAD**

THIS COULD WELL BE THE STORY OF OUR WORLD

The story starts with 3 people, all still alive.
The story ends with the killing of 1000s,
including Samson's wife and father-in-law being burned to death
and finally his own death.

No ultimate satisfaction.
Just ultimate destruction.

Revenge always escalates.
When will the other person ever have suffered enough?
We don't know. We're just driven.

Revenge is like this.

It's *always* the other person who is to blame.
"He started it!" parents hear from the back seat.
And you *always* see yourself in the morally superior position.
Revenge always justifies itself morally.

Once revenge gets a foothold, you lose your ability to think clearly.

You say, "I want to teach them a lesson."
But come one, has anyone you vengefully paid back ever said to you,
"Thank you. What a wonder lesson I learned!"
Did someone's act of revenge toward you ever make come to your senses
and become a better person?

No! Just look at Facebook.

Someone posts something inflammatory (in your opinion)
You feel outraged, indignant, so you post a snarky response
in hopes of changing their minds?

Think about it.

Have you ever changed your opinion because someone wrote an inflammatory post?
Have you ever changed been convinced the other person is really right after all,
after reading their mocking response of your opinions?

What are we doing? It's sheer insanity.

We are trying so hard to win – but we're ALL ending up huge losers.
Revenge just keeps the pain and violence and insanity in circulation.

Revenge is rooted in the myth of redemptive violence.

That the illusion, the lie that you can correct an evil situation with more evil.
You can make things right with more wrong.

It's true in countries; it's true in politics.

It's true between ex-husbands and ex-wives; it's true of current husbands and wives.

But this is what you have to do if you're going to play that game.

First, you have to create an US and THEM world.

Second, you have to demonize the them, to dehumanize them.

It starts out with a little mockery, slurs, name calling, labeling.

Bleeding liberals

Conservative red-necks.

The "them" are less than; less worthy of dignity and respect; less human.

THEN, you can feel morally justified,

No morally obligated to enter the game of revenge.

Here is an illustration that we have enough distance from
to recognize how abhorrent it is.

John is reading a fascinating book about the psychology of the South
that allowed them to dominate the slaves with such cruelty.

Many of these people would have considered themselves good Christian men and women.
How were they able to commit such morally reprehensible acts of violence?

It's easy once you succeed in dehumanizing the other.

Listen to the justification of the Secretary of War, James A Sedden
for fighting to preserve African American slavery
and the doctrine of white supremacy.

**“The black American male has little of true manhood about him.
He was uniquely suited to dull but arduous labor,
utterly unfit for the responsibilities of a free man, citizen or soldier.”**

We are appalled!

But we don't see that *we* are recreating the dehumanizing of the other all the time.

Once dehumanization is in play,
it becomes a moral *obligation* to subjugate or eliminate the opposition.

In World War II, Americans were initially resistant to going to war against the Japanese.
To sway popular opinion in favor of a war against Japan,
George C. Marshall, the United States Army Chief of Staff enlisted Hollywood.

Seven films were produced that characterized Americans as
“fundamentally peaceful, democratic, and rational”
while Japan was characterized as
“a thoroughly militaristic, repressive, irrational nation.”

As a result, Americans soldiers could kill Japanese soldiers and civilians
without the guilt of moral compromise
because Japanese people were no longer afforded humanity.

At the time of Jesus, the Romans had a famous phrase == Pax Romana =
means Roman Peace.

You know how the Romans got peace?

Eliminating the opposition – in the cruelest manor possible (crucifixion)

Into this worldview comes Jesus.

2

**Jesus on the cross says,
the revenge and the violence stop here.**

He says, **It is finished.**

He takes the pain and violence out of circulation.

The only way to stop it to absorb it.



Jesus goes to his death insisting that there is another way to be human
Jesus goes to the Cross rather than to keep the violence in circulation

And this doesn't happen without suffering.

Like Jesus, you are choosing to absorb the pain
instead of passing it on.

At some point, we have to drop the jaw bone.

You say NO, I'm not going to keep the pain and violence in circulation.

Jesus puts the question to us?

Is there another way of being human?

Is there a way to be human that won't end like the story of Samson?

In total destruction?

Is there a way that may look and feel at first like a whole lot like losing,
but that in the end has the power to change the world?

That's the sermon for the next Lenten reflection.