

Samson: A Biography of Strength to Weakness to True Power

Galatians 5:22-23; Judges 16:30

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Greg L. Price

As we hear the cry of Samson to the Lord His God, “Let me die with the Philistines”, we may not understand why that prayer is so important to our consideration of the fruit of the Spirit, especially to the fruit of godly self-control/temperance. It is important because in the life of Samson we see in vivid color how when a Christian allows his/her sanctification to the Lord to be neglected and to become cold, the wall of godly self-control will be breached by self-indulgence and self-pleasure with the result that our testimony for Christ will suffer greatly, our relationships with the godly will suffer loss, and our enemies will gloat and party over our fall.

This we see in the life of the strongest man recorded in history (no one has ever measured up to the standards of Samson’s mighty feats of strength). And yet we learn from Samson, how the mighty fall when the wall of godly self-control falls down, leading to his eyes being put out, grinding grain like an animal, being made a source of amusement to God’s enemies, and his violent death. The Scripture does not hide the faults and sins of even the heroes of faith, for Samson is listed among those very heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32-34. The main points of the sermon this Lord’s Day are the following: (1) The Call of God in Samson’s Life; (2) The Neglect of God’s Call; (3) The Renewal of God’s Call.

I. The Call of God in Samson’s Life.

A. After the death of Moses and Joshua, the Lord raised up judges to deliver and protect His people, Israel, from warring kingdoms that attacked and subdued them. In the Book of Judges we find a cycle that

continues to repeat itself among the backsliding people of God: (1) They turn from serving the Lord their God (doing what is right in their own eyes); (2) God brings upon His people, Israel, His chastening by means of an enemy to make their lives miserable; (3) God sends a deliverer (a judge) to set God's people free when they turn to the Lord in faith and repentance. There are a total of 12 such judges mentioned in the Book of Judges. In this recurring cycle, we see that backsliding from the call and sanctification of God in the life of the Christian will lead to God's fatherly discipline, but that we always have a Deliverer (Jesus our King of kings), who has once and for all delivered us from the guilt and condemnation of sin through his death, and who is daily our Deliverer from the temptations and enemies that confront us in our Christian life through the power of His resurrection. He was made weak with our sin (not His own sin) in order that He might triumph over it by the power of His resurrection.

B. Samson is the last judge narrated in the Book of Judges, and the account of his mighty acts, fall, and restoration live for our instruction. Samson's father was Manoah of the tribe of Dan. We do not know his mother's name. The call of God upon Samson's life began even before his mother conceived him when the angel of the Lord appeared and announced that this barren woman will be blessed by the Lord and given a very special son to deliver His people Israel from their enemies (this angel of the Lord is likely a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, who here identifies his name as "secret" or "wonderful" Judges 13:18; **Isaiah 9:6**). The angel of the Lord reveals that Samson will be set apart unto God as a Nazarite for all of his life (Judges 13:7). What was a Nazarite?

1. A Nazarite was one who under ordinary circumstances voluntarily set himself/herself apart unto the Lord by a vow to be used by the Lord for God's own purposes for a limited period of time. However, there are three recorded instances of Nazarites who were set apart from

the womb and for their entire life: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Jesus was not a Nazarite, but rather a Nazarene (i.e. from the town of Nazareth). Nazarites were dedicated to the Lord for God's purposes (whether for a shorter time or whether until death). Since it was a vow made to the Lord, it could not be vacated or rescinded once one was so dedicated to the Lord (without becoming a covenant-breaker and incurring the anger of the Lord). There are three prohibitions that one took upon himself or herself as a Nazarite (Numbers 6).

a. **First, a Nazarite must abstain from grapes and all products of the grape (whether grape juice, wine, or raisins).** Clearly, wine was not prohibited by God in ordinary use. This was indicative of the Nazarite's dedication to the Lord even to the point of putting away some of the lawful pleasures of this life in order to serve the Lord. In like manner, we as Christians are to deny ourselves even that which is lawful at times in order to serve the Lord (Paul says he will not eat meat again if it causes a brother to fall, 1 Corinthians 8:13). Dear ones, we cannot always cling to what is lawful to enjoy, but we must further consider what is edifying and profitable to Christians and nonchristians alike.

b. **Second, a Nazarite must abstain from touching dead bodies (even the dead body of the closest relations).** This was indicative of the Nazarite's dedication to the Lord to love and serve Him even above the closest relations here on earth. The Lord Jesus said that if we love father or mother, son or daughter (no doubt husband or wife) more than Christ, we are not worthy of Christ (Matthew 10:37).

c. **Third, a Nazarite must abstain from cutting the hair until the time of the Nazarite vow was completed.** The hair of the Nazarite signified his/her vow to be set apart to the Lord for His use and glory (Numbers 6:18-19). After the time of the vow was completed, the hair would then be cut off and offered in the fire on the altar of God. This was indicative of the Nazarites dedication to the Lord to suffer shame for the name of Christ, for long hair was a woman's glory (1 Corinthians

11:15) and a thick head of hair was a man's outward beauty (2 Samuel 14:25-26). Dear ones, if we are not willing to be laughed at, ridiculed, shamed, and scorned for the name of Christ, if we are not willing to take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Him, we are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:38; 2 Timothy 2:12).

2. There is a very real sense, dear ones, that we are all dedicated to the Lord, because the covenant of the Lord is upon us, we have been marked as God's by our baptism, we are called to be the Lord's and to put away the filth of this world, for He has bought us with the price of His own precious blood (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The Nazarite vow was not intended to continue throughout the New Covenant because it was associated with the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Old Covenant (Paul in Acts 18 and others in Acts 21 may have offered Nazarite vows, but this was a transitional period in which the ceremonial law was being given an honorable burial having been legally abolished by the death of Christ on the cross—after the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 a.d. all such ceremonies came to an end).

B. Thus, we see the call of God upon Samson even from before his conception and this call became very evident in Samson's life from his youth (Judges 13:24-25). This work of the Holy Spirit in Samson's life was evident in his great strength (the killing of a wild mountain lion with his bare hands, the slaying of 1,000 men with a 9-inch jaw bone of a donkey, breaking ropes that fettered him like it was sewing thread, and carrying off the gate of city approximately 40 miles). But the work of God's Spirit was also revealed also in God's work of grace in Samson's life. It is unlikely that God gave super-ordinary strength to Samson without some corresponding grace in his heart.

1. Though what may stick out in our minds about Samson is his fall into immorality, this man is listed as a hero in faith's hall of fame (Hebrews 11:32) in spite of his sins and weaknesses which are spread

over the pages of Scripture. Four times it is mentioned that the Spirit of God was actively at work in Samson's life (Judges 13:25; Judges 14:6,19; Judges 15:14); whereas no other judge in the Book of Judges is said to have the Spirit of God come upon him more than once.

2. Though it would seem that Samson struggled with the lusts of the flesh (first in Judges 14:3; then in Judges 16:1; and finally in Judges 16:4), it should also be noted that these stated times at which he fell into the lusts of the flesh occur before he began his 20 years as a judge in Israel and at the end of his life, after he had already judged and delivered Israel from the Philistines for 20 years (Judges 15:20).

3. I certainly do not want to give the impression that what characterized Samson's life was a life of immorality—the Scripture does not teach that (Samson's sin is similar to David's sin and Solomon's sin). What characterized the life of Samson was that the Lord used Samson to defeat and demoralize the Philistines and to deliver God's people from oppression as the Lord gave him the strength to do so. Samson probably did not look like Mr. Universe as far as bodily muscle and size. It was not his physical strength that enabled him to perform amazing feats of power; it was the Holy Spirit that did so working in and through him. Likewise, dear ones, it is not your IQ, or your wealth, or your job, or your talents, or your physical beauty that will make you useful in the kingdom of God—it is the Spirit of God working His fruit in you, working in you both to will and to do His good pleasure. We so often look with pride at the gifts we have or others have when we ought to be in awe of the Spirit of God who takes an ordinary man like Samson and can work in him to be a super-ordinary man to the glory of God (and will do the same in your life if you will live a life of consecration and sanctification to Christ).

II. The Neglect of God's Call.

A. Though Samson had been set apart and sanctified to the Lord

to deliver God's people from the Philistines, there are times in which he did not fortify the wall of self-control by means of renewing his vow to be set apart unto the Lord, but rather allowed the wall of self-control to fall before the lusts of the flesh.

1. **In Judges 14: 1-4**, Samson (who is about 20 years old) sets his eyes and his heart upon a Philistine girl, and will not even listen to reason from his parents, but must have her. Why? Because "she pleaseth me well" (Judges 14:4). Here was a girl that was not among God's covenant people (Deuteronomy 7:3-4), and Samson would not even allow his faith in the Lord God and his Nazarite vow to keep him from having her. Here we see in this instance how his sinful desires swallowed up all that was good and right. Samson not only sinned at this point, but his parents' reluctant compliance to Samson's demand was also indication of sinful, indulgent parents. Samson should have heeded the counsel of his parents (and so should you, dear young people), but he had to have what he wanted even if it was against the revealed will of God.

2. **In Judges 16:1**, Samson (who would appear to have remained single and chaste for about 40 years) now falls headlong into fornication. Having judged and delivered God's people for 20 years in faithful service (Judges 15:20), he fell into temptation. How the enemy looks for those opportunities to strike when we have seen victories in our lives or when we have gone for some significant time without falling into that besetting sin. Usually, it is when our guard is down that the wall of self-control is most vulnerable.

3. **In Judges 16:4-20** (probably shortly after the preceding fall into sin), Samson found himself once again in the home of a woman, Delilah. Delilah was likely a Philistine, for she was bribed by the Philistine lords with an immense amount of wealth to learn the secret of Samson's great strength and to pass that information on to them in order that they might put an end to Samson's rule as judge and deliverer of Israel. Samson was once again led by his emotions, his lusts, and his desire for

passion and intimacy to find Delilah. His lusts were out of control, and were about to lead him to greatest sorrow and misery he had ever known.

a. Dear ones, beware when you find that you are falling into the same sin day after day after day. This is God's flashing red light and the ringing of the bells at a train crossing. You must not cross those train tracks to get to the other side, lest the misery and heartache of that train hit you and carry you away as it did with Samson. To the contrary, you must back up as quickly as you can, cry out to the Lord for his mercy and forgiveness, hate and despise the very temptation to sin as well as the sin, and renew your love, obedience, and sanctification to be set apart to the Lord for His holy use.

b. One unrepentant sin tends to make us more vulnerable to the next one. Having allowed the lusts of the flesh to overwhelm the fruit of godly self-control, it led Samson to indulge the flesh in fornication, which set Samson up to be tempted with and to fall into full betrayal of God's call upon his life and his Nazarite vow as evidenced in his long hair. Samson no doubt thought he would be able to enjoy the lusts of the flesh for a season and then quickly pull back without suffering the loss of his strength and power. But God has a way of teaching us that if we flirt with temptation and sin, we will be burned. When we stop viewing temptation and sin as a destructive enemy that is seeking to breach the wall of godly self-control, and rather treat it as a toy to be enjoyed, we will usher it into our life like a Trojan horse forgetting that the enemy is lodged within and ready to attack. Samson allowed his sinful affection for Delilah to blind him to the danger at hand.

c. Samson apparently believed he was too strong in himself to fall in giving up the truth about the means of his strength in his Nazarite vow and the outward symbol of that vow—his long hair. In order for Samson to be renewed to the Lord, the Lord was about to make him who was the strongest among men the weakest among men.

(1) This was the reason for Paul's thorn in the flesh—to keep him from boasting to himself and to others about the revelations God had given to him (2 Corinthians 12:7). For after Samson compromises the call of God upon his life by way of revealing to Delilah the outward sign of his vow to be God's deliverer, he falls asleep in her lap, and she has his hair (the sign of his sanctification) cut from him. Samson's lustful self-indulgence and Samson's vain pride were the means the Lord used to humble Samson and bring a weakness upon him that he had never experienced.

(2) Not only could he not break the ropes around him, he was also captured by the Philistines, his eyes were gouged out, and he was humiliated and made to turn a mill in grinding grain as an animal would ordinarily do. He was brought from the heights of power to the depths of weakness. How many who are in powerful places and respected places have been brought to the abyss of weakness. And let us never, ever think it cannot happen to us, if we neglect our sanctification in growing in Christ, if we ignore our baptismal call to fight every day against the world, flesh, and the devil, and if we indulge our sinful desires and proudly pretend as if we can finally resist them in our own strength, we too will fall as did Samson and reap the miseries that Samson reaped.

III. The Renewal of God's Call.

A. Now as we turn the page (as it were), we see the lords and great leaders of the Philistines gather by the thousands into the temple of their false god, Dagon, in order to offer to this false god their sacrifices of thanksgiving for having delivered Samson into their power (or so they thought). For the sovereign and almighty God has actually brought them all together in that very temple in order that He might through Samson bring about a greater deliverance and victory over the Philistines than ever thought possible.

B. The Philistines want to be entertained by the helpless and weak Samson. They put him between two pillars upon which the temple rests. They begin making fun and taunting Samson and his God as being weak; for their god, Dagon, has overcome the God of Israel (they claimed). As they become drunk from this great feast and celebration, they either don't notice or don't care that for some time Samson's hair has begun growing back, which is an indication of Samson's faith and repentance in the Lord being renewed and Samson's sanctification in walking with the Lord out of love being renewed as well.

1. Samson asks the guard near him to let him feel these great pillars so that he might lean against them.

2. Samson cries out to the Lord to remember him and to strengthen him one more time by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as His strength returns he pushes against the pillars and lifts his voice, "Let me die with the Philistines." The great building collapses and 3,000 of the highest ranking officials among the Philistines are destroyed in a moment. "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Judges 16:30).

In closing, let us consider the following applications.

1. This past week the enemies of God believed they gained a great victory over the God of the Bible. They gathered around their temple and sang and rejoiced that they had won this battle to enforce so-called same sex marriages in all 50 states. But like the Philistines of old, God brings together His enemies, and they may seem to rule for a while, but the Lord will by His Spirit bring His Church from proud strength to humble weakness in order that they may see the glory of the Lord. Do not fear, dear little flock of Jesus Christ, Jesus is humbling us His Church and showing to us our sin, our idolatry, our forsaking our solemn covenants of our forefathers, our Sabbath-breaking, our having fallen asleep in the lap

of the harlot of Babylon while she clips off our ecclesiastical sanctification as Protestant and Reformed Churches. We as Christ's Church must needs be weakened before we can be strengthened; our eyes must needs be gouged out before we can truly see our sin and need of His sanctification; we must needs be imprisoned and put to forced labor before we will love and appreciate the glorious freedom of walking in God's commandments which Christ has purchased for us; we must needs be brought out and mocked and ridiculed before we will be ashamed of our backsliding; but as surely as did God's Spirit renew Samson's sanctification and power, so as surely God's Spirit will renew His Church in faith, repentance, love, sanctification and power, so that the very temple of the Church of Rome and all false religions of this world will collapse before Christ and His renewed Church. Dear ones, we are reminded that it is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the LORD of hosts.

2. Moving from the Church to you as individual Christians, I pray that God's Spirit will grip each of your hearts so that you embrace God's call upon your life (and if you are not a Christian that you will trust in Christ alone as your only hope of eternal salvation). You (like Samson) have seen those besetting temptations and sins relentlessly attack the wall of godly self-control. If you indulge, flirt with, and play with sin as if it were a toy, you will be pushing over the wall of godly self-control from the inside out. Don't think that you can withstand these enemies in your own strength or in the smell of victory from yesterday. That is to rest in your strength, to rest in past victories as did Samson. Every day is a new day to dedicate yourself to the Lord, to offer yourself as a living sacrifice to Christ to be used for His glory, for the gospel, for the commandments of Christ (even the least of God's commandments). But even if you do fall, don't stay there. Renew your sanctification through repentance eyeing the mercy of God in Christ Jesus and rejoice in your weakness that you might see the power of God manifested in your life. Without Christ you

can do nothing—that is your weakness. But you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you—that is your power. Amen.

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