

Strength Profaned and Lost

Judg 16:21-24

1

21 Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison. **22** However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off. **23** Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.” **24** When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us.”

Think about Samson for a minute. Nobody could be less like what the idea of an Old Testament servant of God should be than Samson. His gift from the Lord was simply physical strength, and it was associated with the defects of his character. His passions were strong, but obviously uncontrolled. He appears to have no, or at least very little, moral character or religious commitment. He didn't lead an army against the Philistines, nor does he appear to have any design of resisting them. He seeks a wife among them, and is ready to feast and play at riddles with them. When he does attack them, it is because he is reacting to personal injuries. His exploits have a mixture of grim humor and fierce hatred quite unlike anything else in the Scriptures, and at times appear to be more like heroes of Homeric or Norse poems than the purpose and righteous wrath of a servant who felt that he was God's instrument. He ties firebrands to jackals, swings the jaw-bone of an ass. These stories almost seem to be the imaginations of a writer rather than truth of the scriptures. Maybe this is where the saying comes from, truth is stranger than fiction. Samson appears to be a strange champion for Jehovah, indeed. But we must take into consideration, in estimating his character, the Nazarite vow, which his parents had made before his birth, and he had endorsed all his life. That gives us some insight into the foundation of his character. The uncut hair and the abstinence from wine were the signs of a commitment to God, which often seems to fail in reaching a deep seated faith, but still was real. Samson's strength depended on his keeping the vow, the outward sign of which was the long hair; and therefore, when he let his hair get cut, essentially he voluntarily cast away his dependence on and commitment to God, and his strength went with it. He broke the conditions on which he received it, and it disappeared. So the story which connects the loss of his long hair with the loss of his superhuman power has a meaning, and puts that meaning into a form or principle of an eternal truth.

2

1) Samson the prisoner

The story of Samson is one of those that even for people who don't know God, or even want to know God, they know this story. The poet Milton caught the spirit of Samson's last moments in his work *Samson Agonistes*, when he writes...

3

“Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves”

The thought of such strength in a man captures the imagination of people, I think that is the reason that this story is so well known. The savage practices of the times used the gouging out of

the eyes, as an easy way of reducing dangerous enemies to harmlessness. As horrible as the thought might be of being blinded, it seems that Samson was better blind than seeing.

Judg 16:28

4

28 Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”

Samson eventually turns to God. Something he had not done previously when times got difficult. Samson always turned to himself and his miraculous strength without giving God the glory for his gift. Samson chose to think that he take care of himself without the help of God.

Col 1:19-21

5

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, **20** and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. **21** And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

We can't make it without the grace and mercy of God, found through Christ and revealed in His word. No man can, not even the strongest the world has ever seen. The lust of the eye had led Samson astray, and the loss of his sight showed him his sin. I wonder if this story was the motivation for our Lord's statements in...

Mark 9:43

6

43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire,

I seriously doubt it, but it is an interesting thought. Manacles of brass showed the fear the jailers had of the possibility that his strength might return. The task he was given was meant as a humiliation, giving him woman's work to do, maybe to imply that this was now all he was fit to do. Generous and confident enemies are merciful in their caring of prisoners; the cruel, and fearful reveal their terror by the indignities they offer to their prisoner.

In Samson we see an impersonation of Israel and any who would follow after God and His Word. Like him, the nation was strong so long as it kept the covenant of its God. Like him, it was ever prone to follow after strange loves. Its Delilahs were the gods of the heathen of the surrounding nations, in whose laps the nation laid its chosen head, and at whose hands it suffered the loss of its God-given strength; like Samson, Israel was weak when it forgot its consecration, its choosing, and its punishment came from the because of its infatuation with idolatrous gods. Like him, it was blinded, bound, and reduced to slavery, all of its power was held, as was Samson's, on condition of loyalty to God. His life is as a mirror, in which the nation might see their own history reflected; and the lesson taught by the story of the captive hero, once so strong, and now so weak, is the lesson which Moses taught the nation...

Deut 28:47-48

7

47 “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; **48** therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send

against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

The blind Samson, chained, at the mill, has a warning for us, too. This is what God's chosen come to, if they adulterate and pervert the God-given strength given through Christ, to the base loves of self and the alluring world. We are strong only as long as we keep our hearts clear of worldly loves, and lean on God alone. Sticking with our analogy; Delilah, the world, is most dangerous when she is allowed to speak the words of deception into our ears. The world's praise is more harmful than its criticism. Its favors are only there to draw the secret of our strength from us, so that we can be made weak; and nothing gives the Philistines of this world as much pleasure as the sight of God's children caught in their lies and robbed of power.

Samson's misery was Samson's blessing. The however of verse 22

Judg 16:22

8

22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

is more than a compensation for all the tribulation inflicted upon him. The growth of his hair isn't mentioned as a mere natural fact, nor with the invalid idea that his hair was what made him strong. There is an important point to be made here, Samson's hair was not what made him strong, God made him strong on the condition of his keeping his vow of consecration. The long hair was the visible sign that he kept it. Note...

Judg 15:14

9

14 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.

Any strength that man has ever had is from God. If we are to withstand the temptations of this world we must have God on our side. The problems sometimes come when we perceive that we have accomplished a victory without the help of God. I'm reminded of when my children were growing up and began to test their abilities. Daddy, I can do this by myself. The more they were allowed to do things and the more they succeeded in doing them the less help they wanted. The problem arose when they tried something they should not have and got lucky. Now they thought they didn't need any help and their actions became restless and even dangerous. Adults are no different. Driving the freeways as much as we do we see people constantly engaging in reckless and dangerous behavior, more often than not, they get away with it. But it just takes that one time when they don't, and you just pray they don't involve you too.

This brings us to our next point...

10

2) godless triumph?

I say it that way because his triumph didn't involve God nor did it give God the glory for it. The worst consequence of the fall of a servant of God is that it gives occasion for God's enemies, for Satan, to blaspheme, and it reflects discredit on Him, as if He were somehow vanquished. Samson's capture is the idol god Dagon's glory. The strife between Philistia and Israel was, in the eyes of both combatants, a struggle between their gods; and so the men of Gaza lit their sacrificial fires and sent up their hymns to their monstrous deity as victor. Isn't this true to-day also? Someone is teaching

others and an indiscretion is found out, the blame is put on God and His Word instead of on the human weakness of the teacher. All sin and fall short of the glory of God, why then do people blame God for man's sin. How often is the excuse heard;

11 ***"I'm not going to church there, those people are hypocrites"***

There may very well be true, but why punish yourself for the sin of someone else. Why blame God for man's weakness. The world takes such malicious pleasure whenever a disciple of God falls away. And unfortunately, look at how swiftly the conclusion is drawn that all Christians are alike, and none of them any better than the rest of the world. The faults of God's children are the defensive bulwarks of unbelief.

Rom 2:23-24 **12**

23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? **24** For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

It is interesting that the exact passage that Paul quotes here is not known. There are a couple in the Old Testament that lend themselves to the idea...

Ezek 36:22-23 **13**

22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. **23** "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

And the second is found in...

Isa 52:5 **14**

5 "Now therefore, what do I have here," declares the Lord, "seeing that My people have been taken away without cause?" Again the Lord declares, "Those who rule over them howl, and My name is continually blasphemed all day long.

While neither of these passages, nor any other from the Old Testament, is verbatim what Paul quoted, both of these speak to the principles of his quote. Satan and all the nay-sayers of the world want nothing more than to gloat in the failings of anyone who is trying to follow God's Word. The honor of Christ is a sacred trust, and it is in the keeping of all of His followers. Our sins do not only darken our own reputation, but they cloud His. Dagon's worshippers rejoiced when they put Samson safely into their prison, with his eyes out. It is these ideas that lead us to our next point...

15 3) Samson made a spectacle for the godless

The feasts of paganism were wild orgies, unlike the purity of the sacrificial meals in Jehovah's worship. Dagon's temple was filled with a drunken crowd, whose joy would be made even more so by a display of cruelty, much like the spectacle of murder and torture seen in the arenas of the gladiators. Satan and the idolatrous worship of his followers seeks a fulfillment of the

physical, the sensual, rather than the spiritual. This is seen in the rock bands and the pageantry of religion today. Who cares if the worship is scriptural as long as it is exciting and entertaining? Paul speaks of a similar problem to Timothy in...

2 Tim 4:3-4

16

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, **4** and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Too often people don't want truth, they want their senses filled and will go where they are entertained instead of where the truth is being proclaimed.

The Philistines were calling for Samson so that they could be entertained. He was brought out and chained to the columns, blind and seemingly helpless in the face of their ridicule. Note their joy...

Judg 16:23-24

17

23 Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands." **24** When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us."

Here then is our last point...

18

4) His last cry

Judg 16:28-31

19

28 Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." **29** Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. **30** And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.

When Samson finally realized that he needed God's help, God gave him the strength to overcome his enemies.

That is the lesson of Samson to us today. Regardless of how strong we might think we are, our strength pales in comparison to that of the enemies that stand against us. Regardless of the occasional victories we might enjoy, they are nothing but a smoke-screen if they are without God and cannot be sustained. Sooner or later, the enemy will prevail and we will be caught in his trap, blind and weak. But like Samson did, we can seek help from God to overcome, and He will be there to help us through. We just have to come to Him on His terms.