

Samson: From gory to glory

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[0 : 00] Let's pray first before we begin. Father God, we want to see the way you work so amazingly, so out of our expectation.

And we want to know you in a deeper way through the reading of your word and understanding of your word this morning. May you have mercy on us and change us through your Holy Spirit.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Samson, while this is a well-known story, do you know that it is not actually read in the Jewish synagogue at all?

They don't want to read this story because they consider such an immoral story that it's not a good thing to read publicly.

And so that if our hope is in a religion, then the story of Samson is not a good story to read or to tell the children about.

[1 : 05] But by God's grace, we know that none of us get to know God or become pleasing to God in the things that we do.

And that's exactly why the story of Samson is in the Bible. And we also read in the book of Hebrews that Samson was one of those Old Testament people who received commendation from God and who is also now part of the great cloud of witnesses who are cheering us on to finish the race.

So should we see Samson as a villain or hero? I think neither. The answer would be neither. I think Samson is just an ordinary man, a fallen man whose life was made extraordinary by God's grace.

He is more like a servant of faith than a hero of faith. His life was not there to tell us how great he was, but his life was there to reveal the glory of God.

So to help us remember the story, I will divide it into four parts represented by four women. The promise to a mother, the pursuit of a wife, the pleasure from a prostitute, and the play acting with Delilah.

[2 : 27] So part one is the promise to a mother. So we know that Samson's parents lived at a time when people did what was right in their own eyes. And that is not something surprising or new.

Even before they went to the promised land, Moses already told them that they were living to doing what was right in their own eyes instead of in God's eyes.

So in Deuteronomy chapter 12, verse 8, Moses said, A day would be coming when God's people would not be doing whatever is right in their own eyes.

So Moses is promising that there will be such a day, but a day hasn't come yet or has not come during the time of judges. Because that day would come when God gave them rest from all their enemies.

So in the time of judges, even though they were able to subdue some of their enemies, but there are still some nations they could not overcome.

[3 : 33] And God did leave those nations there to test his people, to show them they could not save themselves by their own strength. So we were told that Samson's parents were infertile until God appeared and promised them that a son would be born to them.

In the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, there are many people that we know of born from infertile parents, and that is a recurrent theme.

So Sarah was infertile before she gave birth to Isaac. Rebecca was infertile before she gave birth to Esau and Jacob.

And Rachel was infertile before she had Joseph and Benjamin. And Hannah was infertile before Samuel's birth.

So this desperate lay of children, in a way, show us that we need a promised son, someone that God has promised back in Genesis 3, that there will be a son born to a woman who would crush the head of the serpent and deliver his people from the bondage of sin.

[4 : 50] And that is the son that we've been waiting for. Until then, we will not have the ultimate rest from the enemies.

These great difficulties in having children imply our inability to produce a son. When the promised son eventually came, he did not need any human effort to be conceived. Mary did not even require a man to conceive Jesus.

We read in Judges 13, 3-5, The angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, Behold, you are barren and have not born children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.

Therefore, be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

So God told Samson's parents that they would be given a son, and this son was to be set apart to serve God, a Nazirite. A sign of this being set apart is having his hair uncut, and a Nazirite also should not be touching anything that is dead, or having alcohol.

[6 : 21] So that is the sign given for Samson, to be showing people that he set apart for God.

When a similar promise was given to Mary about her giving birth to a son who would save his people, there was no condition mentioned about how this son should live.

We know that Jesus did not need any rule applied to him for him to be different to the world. Jesus loved God with all his heart, so he would naturally be different to the world. But Samson, just like us, naturally loved the way of the world, so his long hair and his other conditions is a reminder to him and others that he was supposed to serve God and not his own pleasure.

So that's part one. Part two, the pursuit of a wife. So Samson grew up, and God was preparing him to be a judge. And we read in Judges 13, 24 to 25, and the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahalidan.

So God was preparing him in that area near the Philistine. But we read that Samson went to Timna. So instead of staying there to prepare, he went to the enemy territory.

[7 : 46] And he did not go to Timna to fight the Philistine. He went there for pleasure. So he saw a Philistine woman and wanted to marry her. Despite his parents' strong objection, he went ahead with the wedding.

Samson told his parents, Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes. Samson thought his happiness was the most important thing to him and also to his parents.

So he insisted to get what he wanted. But God has set him apart. What was important to him was to be holy. His parents might remember Joshua's warning, but they could not act on it.

Joshua, after they went and entered into the promised land, Joshua gave them a warning. In Joshua chapter 23, verses 11 to 13, Joshua said, Be very careful, Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God, for if you turn back and cling to the remnants of these nations remaining among you, and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive up these nations before you.

But they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish of this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.

[9 : 17] So Joshua's, the warning in Joshua was there, but people just couldn't follow it. In particular, it said that there will be the thorns in your eyes and we would see the effects of what Samson was doing eventually.

So he went to Timna, and there is a place that he shouldn't have gone to. But God sent a lion on the way, or the second time when he was going there, perhaps to tell Samson not to expect a good time in Timna.

He might overcome opposition with his strength, but he may not be happy without how the event would unfold. God's purpose for Samson to be a saviour would be fulfilled, whether Samson lived by God's way or his own way.

Samson killed the lion easily, and some days later, he obtained some honey from the carcass of the lion. So remember, as a Nazi, right, he was not supposed to touch anything dead, but he just didn't care.

Samson just did whatever that was piercing to him. Because in his days, sugar is very hard to get by, and getting something sweet is a special treat.

[10 : 39] But from the honey, he came up with a riddle to tease the Philistines in the wedding day. So in Judges 14, 14, Samson said to them, out of the eater came something sweet to eat.

Out of the strong came something sweet. And in three days, they could not solve the riddle. So the riddle might just be a joke for Samson, but there is an important truth in it.

Samson was saying that a strong lion, instead of eating others for food, became a source of sweet food for others. Samson would certainly not give up his own pursuits to sweeten the life of other people.

From the strength of Samson, there was only death to his opponents. But this riddle was a prophecy about a strong person who would give his body to be food for his enemies.

Not only for food, but sweet food. Food that restores our soul. Sometimes we might dream that God would give us power so that we could maintain justice in the world, God is showing us that when we have power like Samson had, we are more likely to live like Samson, using power to gratify the desires of our hearts.

[11 : 52] It is only in Jesus that we see how something sweet came out with his strength. Because of Samson's strength, he could kill the lion. From the dead lion, he found some honey.

From the honey, he thought of a riddle. And through this riddle, a war broke up between Samson and the Philistines. So without knowing it, or meaning it, Samson began his role as a judge to subdue the Philistines.

So start with, Samson killed the Philistine man and destroyed the crop. So by the end of part two, Samson lost his wife. His fun time in Timnah turned sour.

He was not interested in fighting the Philistines to deliver his people. He just wanted to revenge. And he said, after another fight, he would quit. It was no fun anymore.

So in Judges 15, verses 7 to 8, we read, Samson said to them, if this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit.

[12 : 58] And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etem. However, the Lord did not let him quit.

The Philistines used Samson's own people to strike him down. So another fight broke out. This time, we hear Samson pray to the Lord as he was dying of thirst after killing a thousand enemies.

This prayer revealed to us that Samson had some knowledge of God, and he stayed on as a judge for 20 years after that. So his role as a judge seemed to have started with a prayer, and then we will see that it will end with another prayer.

So we go to part three, the pleasure from a prostitute. So what was life like for the Israelites during Samson's time as a judge? We are not told the details, but in chapter 16, only the first few verses, we see that Samson could just walk into one of the five capitals of the Philistines without any care.

The Philistines were at least no match with Samson. We also see that Samson remained the same as far as living for the pleasure of his eyes is concerned. He saw a prostitute in Gaza, and he slept with her.

[14 : 19] Then Samson left the city by simply taking down the city gates with his hands and carried them back to Israel's territory. However, the Philistines were not destroyed or chased out of the area.

The Philistines and the Israelites were in a state of hostile coexistence. power seemed to have made Samson a lone ranger. He did not seem to consult either his parents or his peers for any of his actions.

So last week from the story of Jephthah, Rob was telling us the futility and foolishness to use religion to get what we want. So Jephthah, to ensure his success in fighting the Amalekites, he made a stupid vow as if God would only help him if God was impressed with his sacrifice or his bargain.

Samson did not need to make any vow. He knew that he would be successful fighting with any enemy. So Jephthah was using religion to try to bargain with God.

Samson thought that he was God. Basically, he could do anything. And so he thought that he was a superman. He was the army of one. So when we are gifted in some ways, we find it a lot easier to do things on our own.

[15 : 38] However, the kingdom of God is more about relationship than achievement. So last week, Rob was urging us not to use religion to try to reach God.

This week, I think, I would urge brothers and sisters to serve God with one another. So we learn from those who are more mature and help those who are struggling a bit. It's not so much about what we achieve, but how we work together to live for God's glory.

And that is the way of God's way for us to live as his people. So part four, the play acting with Delilah.

So sometime later, Samson was attracted by Delilah. Delilah was the only woman given a name in the story of Samson. But the meaning of Delilah is flirtatious.

Flirtatious? Yeah. So it is not likely to be a real name. Most likely it will be a nickname. But Samson paid no attention to the warning associated with her name.

[16 : 44] Delilah even told Samson that he was attempting to find out how to subdue him. We can see that sometimes the most gifted people are the most foolish ones because Samson was acting alone.

He thought he was invincible. He did not seek advice from other people and he fell into the trap. So in Judges 16, chapter 16, verses 15 to 17, we read, and she said to him, how can you say I love you when your heart is not with me?

You have mocked me three times and you have not told me where your great strength lies. and when she pressed him hard with her words day after day and urged him, his soul was waxed to death and he told her all his heart and said to her, a razor has never come upon my head for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb.

If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak and be like any other man. So it was fun toying with Delilah until one day Samson gave his heart to Delilah.

Delilah had fully replaced God as Samson's idol. Samson knew God was not there to love Samson. She was there to gain some profit from Samson.

[18 : 12] The cutting of his hair is a sign that Samson's heart was no longer with God. The Philistines eventually subdue Samson. They did not want to kill him.

They gouged out his eyes. They wanted to humiliate him and display him as a sign of their victory. Sitting in the dark dungeon, Samson finally lost all that he enjoyed doing.

At the same time, he was finally forced to examine himself and his life. Now that he did not have eyes to see, he could see a lot more than before. God was merciful to him.

Samson began to mature and draw closer to God. His hair began to grow again, signifying he was having a new beginning with God. While the Philistines wanted to shame him and his God, Samson asked God to grant him one last request that he could die with the Philistines.

He died killing more enemies than what he did in his lifetime. The Philistine leaders thought that they had defeated Samson and his God. they did not realize that they were bringing death into their own camp when they captured Samson.

[19 : 22] And Samson thought that his life had ended when he became weak and blind. He later realized that his life with God was just beginning in his weakness and blindness. We had a friend in Tamworth called Barrow.

She passed away last year, a dear friend of us. she became blind from macular degeneration for about 10 years before her death.

When we first went to Tamworth, I didn't have much to do with Barrow, but my wife, Lei, did because she worked in the kitchen. And Lei was quite fearful of Barrow before she turned blind because Barrow is a professionalist in terms of when she sees things not right, she would say it and so she could be quite critical and difficult to work with.

But after she became blind, Barrow just becomes such a nice person to be with. You just sense of her joy and her calmness and so it's just a joy to be with her.

I think I think when she could see all those things that people did wrong, all the mistakes that people did, she just couldn't resist to try to correct everything.

[20 : 53] And that made her quite a difficult person to work or live with. But when she couldn't see anymore, she just got to change her.

And then there's a time when she becomes joyful in things. It's not so much of one thing, this thing must be done this way and that way. But she just enjoy people's presence and enjoy God's presence.

And sometimes that's how we miss so much by being able to see and letting so many things distract us, influence our emotions, our thoughts.

And missing out so much great things, wonderful things that God brought into our life because we are so insisting on things to be done in our ways and not knowing that God has done beautiful things in our life and other people's lives that appreciate that.

And this barrel's change always is a lesson to me. So was Samson safe? So I think so because it's them in Hebrews 11.

[22 : 02] and also the Bible tells us that his family took his body back to the promised land and buried him there. So when the Old Testament tells us that someone is buried, that is meaning.

It's not just tell us that it's buried. But it tells us that this person is buried in that land when God has promised that they have this hope of resurrection.

That's special. And that's why we see when Jacob went down to Egypt, before he died, he asked Joseph to promise that he must bring his body back to the promised land to be buried there.

It's so important for him because he's got this hope of glory and that's what God's people are looking for. So when we read Hebrews, we admire the faith of people like Abraham, Moses, and Gideon, but we find it difficult to see how Samson could be included in this list.

So the fact that Samson is included in the list tells us that their faith was not their own, but it came from God. And if you meet people like Moses or Abraham in heaven and praise them for their faith, they will tell you that it was all God's grace.

[23 : 20] They will not boast in their faith, but they will tell you that the founder and perfecter of their faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. their lives were just a shadow of the coming king and serve as encouragement to us.

If God can save Samson and use him for his purpose, he can do the same for any of us. So in Hebrews 12 verses 1 to 2 we read, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of weaknesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the front of God.

So even Samson is among the cloud of weaknesses and we see him and we want to lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely. We don't want to live like Samson.

And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus. Does it seem unfair that Samson still had the hope of glory despite his disobedient living?

[24 : 33] In a way it is unfair. It was the obedient living of Jesus Christ that gave us and Samson the hope of glory. In another way though, the one who lost out the most of Samson himself when he lived in disobedience, he missed out so much joy of the Lord when he was blinded by the pleasure of the world.

Samson refused to die to himself. He wanted to gratify all his desires. I think if you ask Samson if he had a good life, he would tell you that he was the prodigal son who squandered all his father's gifts on worthless things.

And if you ask Samson what the most painful experience in his life was, he would no doubt say having his eyes gouged up. However, he would be most thankful to having his eyes gouged up.

It was only when he became blind that he became free from his own sinful desires. Despite his flaws, Samson was a shadow of Jesus in three ways.

One, he was a promised saviour. So the real saviour would come from God and be a promise from God. Two, he was a strong man and we do need a strong man, a strong saviour to deliver us from our enemies.

[25 : 48] Three, he saved his people by dying. So we can only be free from the curse of law by having a saviour who would die for us. Samson was indeed a very flawed example of a saviour, but he did become a judge for 20 years.

Even his prayers were quite immature, but at least he prayed. And we can see this is God's grace. God is not looking for us to be perfect, but at least there should be some sign of us being changed, wanting to be like Jesus, and wanting to be gracious to other people as well.

Some people may ask, can we live like Samson and expect to be safe at the end? I think we can answer this question with two questions. So why would you want to look to Samson as an example to live by when we have the perfect saviour, Jesus Christ, to look up to?

Number two is, and why would you want to drink from the well of this world to quench your thirst while there is living water from the Lord Jesus Christ? Hebrews 12, 14 tells us to strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see God.

The power given to Samson was an external power. There was little internal change in Samson until we became blind. We do not need to become blind or invalid to change from pleasure seeking to holiness seeking, because we are given power inside us.

[27 : 14] That was why in Ephesians 3, the Apostle Paul was praying for the Ephesians that they would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in their inner being. Judges is a book about our fallen nature.

We would naturally reject God. Even the judges whom got raised up to save his people were seeking their own glory and pleasure. God himself has to come as a human to save us.

It is not a book about external behavior, what we should do or what we should not do. It is a book about our hearts. Samson gave all his heart to Delilah and he became a slave to his enemy.

On our Friday Bible study, two nights ago, a young man asked if it was okay to buy shares. Where is the limit? Is it gambling or is it investment? Is it wise?

So there's lots of factors we can consider. But I think the most important thing is whatever we do is where is our heart? Whose glory are we living for?

[28 : 19] Otherwise there will be too much rules and regulation of what you can do or what you can't do. We look at our hearts. God brought Samson our life of pleasure seeking and bloodshed to a life of God seeking and shedding his own blood.

When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, giving his body and blood to fulfill the righteousness of God, that was his hour of glory. And the Lord wants to bring us there to share this glory.

When we have the joy of suffering for righteousness sake, when we are willing to live and die for something and someone greater than us, that would be glory. Hebrews chapter 2 verse 10, for it was fitting that he, for home and by home all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation, perfect through suffering.

Let us pray. Father, we tremble before you, thinking that you would bring people like Samson, people like us, to glory, not only to bring us there, but by giving us your son, so that we can be there, and not only giving us your son, but by letting your son suffer, so that our sins can be forgiven.

Amen. Father, we look at Samson, and look at us, and see how far we are away from your glory, how little we see and know about this glory.

[30 : 20] Father, we thank you for your mercy upon us, and that we would have a desire for this glory, and looking for the city that is to come.

Father, we ask that you will help us to live our life worthy of calling, that we might strive for holiness in the way we live.

Thank you, Father. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.