

Samson 1

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[0 : 00] Psalm 80 We sing now in Psalm 80, the 80th Psalm, singing from the beginning, the tune is Evan.

Let us read now in the Old Testament in the Book of Judges, chapter 13. The Book of Judges, chapter 13.

To that reading from his word. We sing now in Psalm 138, Psalm 138. And we sing verses 1 to 5 of the Psalm to the tune Winchester.

Let us turn now to the chapter we read, the Book of Judges, chapter 13. And we're taking us our connecting link, the last two verses of the chapter.

Verse 24. And the woman bare a son and called his name Samson.

[1 : 30] And the child grew and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtal.

Now, some weeks ago, I studied the other three judges who were mentioned in the epistle of the Hebrews, chapter 11.

Namely, Barak and Jephthah and Gideon. And tonight, I would like to resume our studies in this book.

And for the next day, tonight and for the next two Sabbaths, study with you this man, Samson. You will know that in the book of Judges, which is made up of 21 chapters, four chapters are devoted to this man's history.

And he's the only judge of the four mentioned in Hebrews whose biography is given from his birth, indeed from his conception, to his death.

[2 : 51] He belonged, as we read here, to the tribe of Dan, which together with the tribe of Simeon, was in the southern part of Israel, of Canaan.

He wasn't a judge in the strict sense of the word like Barak and Jephthah and Gideon, because there was no army at the head of which he marched.

Verse 5, the end of the verse, really gives an account of the work that God had in view for this man. He will begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

In other words, he was to begin a work which was to be completed by another, namely Samuel. His personal characteristics are preserved for us fully.

You have what you would probably call today a biography of the man, warts and all. His strong points are clearly mentioned, as are his weak points.

[4 : 05] And he comes across to us as a somewhat inconsistent man, a man of great physical endowment, great physical strength, but also, unfortunately, great moral weaknesses and defects.

His passions were mighty, both for good and evil. Someone has put it like this, these passions broke forth in flames that were irrepressible, flames by which he himself was consumed almost before he had reached his prime.

I suppose it is true to say that he is remembered exclusively for his feats of great strength and daring against the Philistines.

I suppose that there are some children here tonight who, when they think of Samson, think solely of him from that point of view.

He was the strongest man who ever lived. This is the common conception of Samson. Someone put it like this, that he comes across as a great, rollicking Hercules, full of grim and dangerous sportiveness.

[5 : 32] Let us remember that he was also a man of moral weakness. And in that sense, perhaps he is intensely human.

He is, as someone, a vastly enlarged specimen of our ordinary humanity, and especially of the ordinary Christian.

Because let us all remember that what immortalizes Samson is that he was a man of faith. And that's why he finds his place in that catalogue of saints mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11.

The Holy Spirit maybe places him before us in the Bible so that we may see, each one of us, the leading features of our own character portrayed as in a mirror.

Only in the case of Samson, the portrayal is, of course, larger. And what a sin is more easily recognised, more easily deciphered maybe, than in the case of ordinary mortals.

[6 : 46] He was a mighty man of faith, who on the other hand, failed miserably to subdue his own passions.

A mighty man of faith, whose backslidings were terrible, and whose whole life was marred through these base desires of his, breaking out and mastering him as they sought fulfilment.

At times, he resisted these passions. Other times, they got the better of him. And as you think of Samson, in that context, perhaps you can just as easily think of yourself.

Because just as there are times when you seem to be in control of yourself, so there are other times when you lose control of yourself.

And for that reason, the study of this man's character ought to be interesting, if nothing else. And I hope, relevant.

[8 : 02] Not all the lessons of his life, of course, are positive ones. There are lessons which are positive, lessons which we are encouraged to follow.

Other lessons, we are certainly instructed not to follow. His life, maybe, was largely a failure.

So someone says, and yet, I think that we are to be very careful when we make a statement like that, because, as I said earlier, he finds his niche in the Bible, because he was pre-eminently a man of faith, as I said.

With a single arm, said another, moved with superhuman power, he was to engage in regular and spasmodic struggles, to perform feats in the sight of the most persistent and powerful of all the enemies of Israel, namely the Philistines.

Now, it is in the lifetime of Samson that this powerful nation really bursts upon the pages of history.

[9 : 24] The background to the Philistine dynasty is very, very difficult to determine. But we know that by the time that Samson was born, they had become the most conspicuous of all of Israel's enemies, and certainly the most powerful.

The Philistines were a very superstitious and a very idolatrous people. Not only did they carry their idols with them into battle, but the ordinary individual, young and old, carried images and idols around with them.

We know that there were five main cities associated with the Philistines. Ashdod, Ekron, Ashkelon, Gath, and Gaza.

And in these cities, in some of these cities, were the temples to their main deities, the idols whom they worshipped.

In Ashdod, there was the temple erected to the idol Dagon, who was part human and part fish. In Ekron, there was a temple erected to the idol, to the god Baal-zebub, who was the god of flies.

[10 : 46] And in Ashkelon, there was a temple erected to the goddess, the Ashtoreth. Now, they were both powerful and very, very idolatrous people.

And by the time that Samson was born, the southern part of Canaan was completely under their dominion.

And if you read in the first book of Samuel, chapter 13, you will see that they had such a stranglehold over the Israelites that not only were there no weapons or warfare left in Israel, there were no agricultural implements either.

Every instrument that they needed, even for the cultivation of the land, they had to acquire with the permission of the Philistines.

And the stranglehold was such that the spirits were up, the spirit of the Israelites were absolutely broken. And as I see in a minute, as I see later on now, not tonight, but God willing next week, the Israelites themselves were furious at one stage with Samson and were prepared to hand them over to the Philistines because of the trouble that he was causing them through reprisals against the Israelites from the Philistine hand.

[12 : 14] So this people Israel, by this time, were both enslaved and ruined by the tyranny of the Philistines.

And it was into the sin that this man was born. Now there is something unique about Samson. And it is the uniqueness that characterizes him that I want to deal with for a little tonight as I seek to introduce these studies to you. First of all, then, there was the uniqueness of the announcement of his birth.

And then secondly, there was the uniqueness of his own lifestyle. Thirdly, there was the uniqueness of the ministry or the work to which he was called.

And fourthly, there was the uniqueness of the way in which he was equipped for this work. First of all, then, the announcement of his birth was quite unique.

[13 : 23] And here we're given an insight into a home in Israel at a time when Israel was in danger of extinction.

The home of Manoah and his wife. Now it's very easily seen that this was a godly couple. To Manoah's wife, one day, an angel or the angel of the Lord appeared. There are various references to this. Almost the whole chapter is taken up with what happened when the angel appeared to Manoah's wife.

They had no family. And of course, barrenness to a Hebrew woman was almost akin to living in disgrace. So he announced to her that she was going to have a child, a son.

And she was given specific commandments regarding her own diet during her pregnancy. She was to eat no grapes. She wasn't to drink strong drink.

[14 : 40] And she wasn't to eat anything unclean. Now this was connected with the kind of child that she was going to conceive and going to give birth to.

He was, and you've heard this term, I'm sure, often enough, he was to be a Nazirite from the womb. Now that meant this.

He came under, of course, the vow of the Nazirite. And that meant that from the day of his conception that he was separated to the Lord.

That's what being a Nazirite meant. And coming under a Nazirite vow meant this. As I see, one of the things that was, one of the ways in which a Nazirite was distinguished was that he didn't have his hair cut.

Now, of course, on our day, you're acquainted, from time to time, with people like this. You wonder if they've ever had a haircut. And you can imagine how long Samson's hair would be.

[15 : 40] But that was the outward sign of an inner separateness in his life to the Lord. This was the evidence of it outwardly.

In the case of a Nazirite, his head wasn't, no razor should come upon his head or he was never to have a haircut. And hence the reason for the length of Samson's hair.

Now, being a Nazirite from the womb meant this. That the child lived from the time of his conception. And there were very few of them mentioned in the Bible. Samuel was one.

John the Baptist was one. Very few of them mentioned in the Bible. But they were children who were the Lords from the time of their conception. They were born into the world and they were believers.

They were under the blessing of God from the very moment of their conception. That was what was meant by it. separated to the Lord. Now, to show that this was the kind of child she was to bear, she was given strict instructions concerning the way in which she was to eat and drink herself.

[16 : 50] Just in the same way as the Nazirite himself was to regulate his eating and his drinking habits rigidly while he lived.

And that is one way in which you see Samson's backslidings come to light. He knew that he was a child separate from the Lord. He knew that he was a Nazirite from the womb.

He knew that he had to regulate his life accordingly. He knew that a responsibility laid upon him and yet he failed time and again to honour these obligations.

And in many respects this is what happens in the case of any backslider. Every Christian who isn't true to his Christian commitment is not honouring the obligation under which God has placed him.

And putting it quite simply, a Christian who is inconsistent or a Christian who is backslidden is quite simply being irresponsible.

[18 : 00] It is one thing for God to bless God alone can bless. It is ours to be responsible and to act responsibly to the God who has blessed us.

And this is where Samson failed often miserably in his life. And as I said earlier here's a picture of every Christian. I'm sure that it is there that each one of us as Christians recognise we ourselves fail miserably as well.

We are not as responsible to the demands of God upon us as we ought to be. Well, the fact that that announcement was made to this woman by the angel signified at once that there was something unique about the child that she was to bear.

when Manoah came home his wife related to him the experience. Now the interesting to notice here is this she didn't recognise that the visitor from heaven was an angel.

She said a man from God whose face was terrible who looked like an angel came to me today and told me that I'm going to have a son. Now Manoah did not respond with an air of incredulity at all with an air of unbelief he believed the message and what Manoah did was this he prayed to the Lord that the Lord would send this man again not because he was unbelieving but because he wanted confirmation of this for himself.

[19 : 36] He wanted his own faith strengthened. Now there is nothing wrong as we saw in the life of Gideon there is nothing wrong with asking the Lord to strengthen your faith and to give you tokens of that in your own life.

There is nothing at all wrong with that. That may not at all be the fruit of unbelief but the evidence of true and genuine faith. It is as Manoah wanted to know the will of God more perfectly for himself.

Well as the Lord so often does he answered condescendingly Manoah's request and so the angel came again to the woman and the woman hurried out and said to Manoah he has come and Manoah came in.

Now the angel did not give him any information whatsoever any added information he just reiterated what he had told Manoah's wife before.

but the interesting thing is this that Manoah didn't seem to recognize him as the angel of the Lord either.

[20 : 50] Verse 17 Manoah said what is thy name that when thy sayings come to pass we may do the honor. He seemed to consider him as nothing more than a prophet an unusual prophet at that but he didn't seem to grasp the fact that this was the angel of the Lord.

What is your name? And so the angel answered why do you ask after my name seeing it is and the translation you have in verse 18 is this it is secret the word should read it is wonderful my name is wonderful so Manoah took a kid with a meat offering and offered upon a rock unto the Lord and the angel did wondrously or did wonderful things as Manoah and his wife looked on.

Well this again is in accord with what the Bible tells us the angel of the Lord was none other than the Lord Jesus himself this is the way in which the Lord Jesus referred to in the Old Testament the angel of the Lord or the angel of the covenant to distinguish him from the likes of Gabriel and the other angels this was the Lord appearing in human form as he frequently did in the Old Testament a human form so that he could be identified and recognised as the Lord and when he left Manoah himself recognised that we we're going to die because we have seen the Lord we have seen Elohim we have seen the messenger coming from the Lord not God himself essentially I've just seen a minute but the Lord in human form and he did wondrously he ascended in the flame of the offering that they offered they offered too there was a meat offering and a burnt offering offered by Manoah in honour of the heavenly visitor and it was as the flame of the burnt offering ascended that they saw the angel himself ascending and disappearing in the flame there's great biblical spiritual teaching there for those of you who want to exercise your mind in these things it reminds us for example of the wonders performed by our Lord himself he of whom it is said in Isaiah chapter 9 his name shall be called wonderful and there was no one in all the world to perform the wonders that he did when he offered himself sacrificed himself for Calvary and ascended to God in the flames of his own sacrifice in the flames of the divine wrath of God he ascended and presented himself a perfect complete sacrifice for his people anyway we'll leave that to one side now the effect that this heavenly visitor had upon it on Manoah and his wife is very interesting

Manoah and his wife Manoah said to his wife we shall surely die they fell on their faces to the ground as they looked on they were filled with awe filled with fear filled with reverence oh how often you have this in the Bible whenever the Lord appeared in this way to Isaiah to John to Saul they fell on their faces I've said it when we're dealing with Isaiah chapter 6 some weeks ago this is the effect that the presence of the Lord would have here tonight you may say and I may say if the Lord came in here tonight it would be wonderful it would how would you feel perhaps you think you'd feel full of

joy full of peace you may not you may be afraid you might be full of fear if the Lord appeared they were filled with awe and they fell on their faces to the ground it's strange isn't it how when you ask things of

[25 : 11] God how when he gives his answer it can be so different to what you thought it would be I want to remember today and I still can't remember it some of you will the words of John Newton in that wonderful hymn of his when he speaks of this when he asks that the Lord would enable him to grow in grace and he had his own preconceived ideas as to how he used to become Christ-like the kind of things that would be in his life and so on but this is one or two of the things that he said I hope that in some favoured hour at once he'd answer my request and by his love constraining power subdue my sins and this is it and give me rest instead of this he made me feel the hidden evils of my heart and let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part yea more with his own hand he seemed intent to aggravate my woe crossed all the fair designs that I had schemed blasted my goods and laid me low we sang that night in psalm 65 the same thing thou dost give by terrible things an answer to our prayers when you're looking for something and let you and I be warned on this and yet you cannot but ask it every

Christian wants to be sanctified every Christian must become like Christ we must pray for these things but all the difficulties through which we may have to pass before God gives us or as God is giving an answer to our prayer Manoah prayed for the heavenly visitor Lord send him again he came he revealed himself as wonderful did wonderful things in his presence and Manoah was filled with fear in the presence of the Lord I wouldn't be surprised if in a real sense heaven came to earth here tonight you and I might very well tremble in our shoes because we on the earth are so unlike heaven anyway

Manoah came to a wrong conclusion he turned to his wife and he said oh he said we're going to die we have seen the Lord we have seen God now of course I mentioned this earlier the word here is Elohim we have seen the messenger not Jehovah no man can see God and live God said this to Moses Moses said to God show me thy glory God said to him you can't no man can see me and live so God must adopt a form by which we can recognize and what is seen of God is what he manifests what he reveals himself when the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration saw the glory of Christ it wasn't the essential glory of his divinity that they saw they couldn't see that and live it was the glory that was given to him as a mediator that they saw the glory that was going to be his and that was the glory that

Peter referred to in the second letter when he saw when he was preaching about the glory of Christ in the second coming and someone would say to him how do you know that Christ is going to come in that glory because I saw it with others and and and because the word of God tells me that he has it and that he's coming in it it was the glory of the mediator revealed that Manoah saw as well and he said to his wife we're going to die ah what a wonderful woman Manoah's wife was I think this is one of the most beautiful verses in the whole of the Bible his wife turned to him and said if the Lord were pleased to kill us he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands neither would he have showed us all these things nor would he at this time have told us such things as these she based her answer on three things an accepted sacrifice a gracious revelation and precious promises and you know this my friend if you have that assurance tonight you can say with the psalmist

I shall not die but live and shall the works of God discover God accepts you on the basis of the sacrifice that Christ offered God has blessed you on the basis of his own graciousness and in blessing you he has given you precious promises and he didn't do that so that he may kill you but that you may live forever in his presence it's the only hope that any one of us can have as we face eternity you know that perhaps or maybe there are some people here for whom this may be relevant it's relevant for myself as I consider in the province of God if I'm spared to officiate another baptismal service I think there's a tremendous chapter for that kind of service to give you a picture of a godly couple who loved one another in the

[31 : 20] Lord and who spoke to one another of the things of the Lord and I think that Manoa's wife as very often happens in many Christian homes she was the better of the two she was the weaker vessel but she was stronger in faith she was a more intelligent believer she recognized the significance of spiritual things better than Manoa did I'm sure that you could think of homes like that I can think of a home like that the first woman I ever heard pray in my life was on the island of Lewis when as a young boy I was present in a home where they were conducting worship the husband

was not a professing Christian but as the head of the home he conducted worship and I'll tell you this maybe it'll interest the young folk here tonight I was a teenager about 14 and the man was reading and he had the Bible the family Bible and every so often he would stumble he wasn't a very good reader he would stumble across some words and no matter how often he stumbled she came out with the word perfectly and then went to her knees and he led in prayer remember yet the verse that he was quoting from

Psalms 27 and he couldn't get it and his wife prayed with him and quoted the verse for you know there's a wonderful example of Christian unity and godliness in practice may I ask you here tonight some of you may wonder what's the point of a sermon like this on a Sabbath evening well perhaps here's one applicator I hadn't thought of till right now you and I have children gifted to us from God what kind of home have they been born into what kind of conversation do they hear what is the emphasis laid on can you lead your child to the throne of grace and can you instruct your child in the things of God and you who are boys and girls in this church tonight do you have parents like that yourself do you see them reading the

Bible do you hear them praying and praying for you and you remember this that if you do you've got one of the most precious gifts that God could give you on the face of this earth there are many many many children and may this perhaps be the reason above all other reasons for the growing incidents of vandalism and so on not only throughout the length and breadth of our country but in the island of Lewis and now in Stornoway may this be the reason above all reasons for it that there has been disgorged now onto the streets of our towns more and more children who hear nothing of the grace of God and who see nothing of its practice within their walls what a privileged child

Samson was a child of prayer a child of promise and a child of privilege born into a hostile world the product of godly perils and that leads me to consider here the uniqueness of this man's lifestyle now I mentioned this already he was a Nazirite man's hair was not cut he had to be careful what he ate and what he drank he was separated to the lord now there were times when people took these vows upon themselves for example in the book of Acts you may know that Paul took upon himself a Nazirite vow now ordinarily the vow lasted for about 30 to 60 days if people wanted to do something particularly for the lord in the service of the lord they set themselves apart just for a period but in Samson's case it was for his life this was not a temporary thing it was a permanent thing it wasn't a voluntary act it was a command he was a Nazirite from the womb at the command of God and I said already he did not honour his responsibilities as he ought you know there's one other thing I want to say this kind of man was separated unto the lord from everything that would militate against a life consecrated to the lord now there are some people who may think that that kind of life surely must be pretty morose pretty drab a kind of he lived a kind of hermit existence but that is not the way in which the Bible presents consecration to the lord at all the Bible doesn't allow you and me to think of a man who dedicated his life to the lord as going along with a long face a face like tomorrow and a full of nothing but dreariness and weariness and moroseness of spirit you know the kind of person is a wet blanket that's not the kind of person that a person direct separate to the lord was he was full of the joy of the lord it was the lord who was at the heart of his life and if the lord is at the heart of your life you have joy you're only miserable when your self is at the heart of your life when you feed upon your own self and upon your when you feed on self-pity and even on self-denial self-self-self-self produces a morose individual but the lord fills a person's life with himself and he's filled with the joy of the lord and there was that type of person who said

[37 : 53] I joy to enter the house of God go up they said to me they love the things of the lord well that was the kind of man that Samson was the kind of child that he was and he was born into the world like that and then finally we look briefly at the uniqueness of his ministry the child grew and the spirit and the lord blessed him and the spirit of the lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtal well there was something very unique about him he grew and the lord blessed he grew physically and he grew spiritually reminds you of the lord Jesus didn't it doesn't it he grew in wisdom and stature before God and with men before men there was physical development and spiritual development in this unique individual who together with Isaac had his birth announced by the angel of the lord but this is what we read the spirit of the lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zora and Eshtal now I think that it's predicted that for this reason we are not to think of Samson as a giant like Goliath when you think of Samson as people speak of him as the strongest man who ever lived you picture a man here who was physically

enormous well we're not told that he was but what we are told is this that his feats of daring were accomplished by the spirit of god taking possession of him the spirit of god began to move him at times in this place where he lived and he lived in a valley along which the philistines would often pass carrying their bounty from the poor israelites he saw often the hated enemies of the lord and the spirit moving him i think is meant to convey this to us that the spirit moved his heart and his mind to intense intense a a dislight of the enemies of israel he was endowed supernaturally by the spirit of god now you know for example that this is the way in which the prophets lived the same word is used again by peter holy men of god spake as they were moved or impelled by the spirit of god now when the prophets were writing the bible and the apostles were writing the bible what we understand by that is this inspiration doesn't mean that let's assume they had a piece of paper and a pen which they didn't but so you and i can understand this let us assume for a moment that a prophet took a piece of paper and a pen and what he did was this he closed his eyes put the pen on the paper and he noticed after a while that some power was moving his hand up and down along the page along the page and up and down the page and when he opened when the power left him he opened his eyes and look behold he had written a page and this was the bible that's the way some people understand inspiration that's a nonsense an absolute nonsense what they

did was they wrote and when they wrote the word of god they were supernaturally endowed by the spirit so that what they wrote was the word of god and that is the inspired word that we have but as they wrote they were also responsible men they didn't have to get the responsibility when the spirit of god supernaturally endowed them and as I said earlier this is what samson failed the spirit of god endowed him at times supernaturally to work wonderful miracles and feats of daring in the name of the lord against the philistines but he was not the responsible man at other times that he ought to have been the holy spirit what in his life as a child as a boy in adolescence growing up what in him holy indignation against the philistines wrote in his heart righteous impatience with them wrote in his heart scorned for the wrongs that they were doing to the israelites and what in his heart special feelings of special hatred against the injustices that could be attributed only to ungodliness and godlessness and idolatry and superstition no my friend that's what the spirit of god does today when the spirit of god moves in you when he begins to move in a young person's life or an old person's life what does he do the spirit of god works in that heart resentment of what is wrong and a love for what is right it works in him indignation holy indignation against those who are the enemies of the cause of christ and works in his heart love and desire for the things of god the spirit of god moves him to grieve over sin and over the sins in his own life and the sins in the lives of other people and impels him to seek and to love holiness and righteousness and truth when the holy spirit fills your soul it works in your fervor zeal for the things of god when the spirit moved

Moses in egypt he acted on the side of the israel when the spirit of god moved the spirit of daniel he acted in the land of idolatry against idolatry and when the spirit of god begins to move in your life it acts it moves you as well to act in a direction which you didn't act before makes you choose what is right and refuse what is wrong and the spirit of god moved him as a youth and filled him with a mysterious anticipation concerning the future now i don't think this was a supernatural endowment now as i said and as i've tried to say you who are here tonight may know something of this yourself in a measure have you begun to be troubled by the spirit of god have you begun to be moved by the spirit of god in the direction which i've tried to show the spirit of god turning your life and if it is i'm sure that you would pray that the spirit of god would begin to move in the lives of people in this town tonight young and old oh for the day when you and i would see the evidence of the spirit's work in the lives of people next week we follow this man and we'll see how grievously he went wrong notwithstanding the fact that the spirit equipped him let us pray bless to us oh to thou bless us we pray thee bless us as families you unite as parents and as children may the spirit of the living god indwell our hearts and may we know the powerful influence of his leading for as many as are led by the spirit of god they are the sons of god we pray thee oh god that we don't deserve it that thou come come with us in mighty quickening saving power and make thyself known in thy grace bless to us thy word go before us and watch over each one of us and forgive our sins for jesus sake amen thee oh thank you