

### **INTRODUCTION PRIOR TO THE READING:**

Last week we considered the physical strength of Samson but also his moral weakness. That led someone to say, "Samson 'is awfully strong and terribly weak.'" Today's story shows us a different side of Samson. Not yet an entirely Spirit-refined leader but clearly one with a growing sense of his mission and God's call on his life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

I once went to a sawmill and picked up a piece of rough 1 x 6 pine. I mean rough. Not planed at all. It's not the kind of wood you pick up at a lumber store which has been cut to an exact size and smoothed. It is rough but it has all the potential to become something useful and even beautiful. However, that's going to take some real work and effort from someone.

Lately Patsy and I have watched some of the episodes of a Pottery Show. I never thought I'd enjoy that, but I do. It's fun watching various potters create amazing pots and much more from a lump of clay. There are so many details that need to be well-executed to create a gorgeous piece of art from the raw material.

When you look at Samson, you can say, "Clearly, God is working with some pretty raw material here. Samson is not very refined." We would never say that about a cute little baby, but once a child grows up and we see the things he says and does, we might make a judgement. But with that said, it's more important for us to look at what God is doing rather than at the person he's using! Samson wouldn't be the first leader of God's people to be less than perfect, especially in our eyes. But maybe looking at Samson will help you see and believe that God can use even you!

God uses some of the most unlikely people, despite their weaknesses. And often the people we think are best qualified are not the ones God uses. So let's look at this story of revenge, pride and the Holy Spirit.

### **Samson's Legitimate Passion**

First, consider Samson's legitimate passion. When we think about passion, especially anger, we normally associate it with sin. That's why the Apostle Paul told us to watch out when we get angry. In Ephesians 4:26 & 27 he writes,

*Eph 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.*

There is such a thing as righteous anger but I really don't think most of us know what it looks like. That's why Paul connects our anger with giving the devil a foothold or a point of entry into our lives. This is why he tells us to put on the armour of God so that we can defend ourselves against such wrong passions of our flesh. Becoming angry because of something that is truly wrong is not bad. But most times when we get angry we shout and scream about how so and so did this and that wrong to me, and, how he's

going to get it now. In that context anger often results from pride (we think we are better or know better than others) and that gives birth to revenge (I'm going to get even with him). Clearly, Samson's anger is not all of the sanctified kind, but it is legitimate.

There's a sense in which Samson, the God-appointed judge, deliverer and leader of the people of Israel, has a right to be angry. Think about it. If you recall the story in Judges 14, his 30 companions threaten his wife to get him to tell the answer to his riddle at his wedding. They won the bet through illegitimate means.

That in itself is a reason for anger. No one deserves that sort of treatment, whether it's your wedding day or not. And when we get to chapter 15 the story gets worse. Samson still has a Philistine wife whom he is crazy about. He married her in a fully legitimate, week-long wedding ceremony. As chapter 15 begins, Samson is heading back to Timnah to see his wife. He has cooled off after the whole crazy episode surrounding the riddle. And he comes bearing the gift of a goat for his wife. But when he gets to Timnah, his father in law reports,

*Jdg 15:2 "I was so sure you thoroughly hated her," he said, "that I gave her to your companion. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead."*

Well, I know that I for one would not be happy with any of my wife's seven sisters! Don't tell them that. But that's just not the way it works! I fell in love with Patsy, not her sisters. So Samson had a legitimate reason to be angry. The Philistines continually show their poor morals. They cheat to win a bet and now the father of his wife does not honour the marriage between his daughter and Samson, even though that marriage is totally legitimate—even from a Philistine point of view. So Samson bursts out in anger.

*Jdg 15:3 Samson said to them, "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them."*

More literally, what Samson says is this: *"I am innocent in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm."* And then he sets out to burn their crops.

Now, it had to have been quite the spectacle. And I don't know how long it took him to gather 300 foxes! But clearly, even apart from the Spirit of God coming on him, he was a strong man. And his anger turned to revenge. We'll see later that God used it for divine purposes but that still doesn't excuse Samson for his rage and revenge, nor his mistreatment of animals for that matter.

What we see is that Samson had legitimate reasons to be angry, but revenge is not a spiritual quality God desires to see in us. Yet this story is full of revenge. Samson's is just one part. The Philistines also seek revenge. They plot to subdue Samson for burning their crops. They want revenge. To begin their repayment, they kill his wife and her family because of Samson. They take revenge. And when they have captured Samson, plucked out his eyes and paraded him in front of the crowd in their temple in ch.16, they feel that they have achieved their revenge. And to them, it is sweet revenge.

As God's people, though, we need to see that when we seek revenge, we are taking matters into our own hands. And that's wrong. Being angry—even legitimately—is one thing; but seeking revenge dishonours God, even when he sovereignly uses it for

his purposes. We are called to heed the word of the Lord. Our actions are supposed to flow out of our faith that Jesus has paid for our sins and reconciled us to God.

Therefore, the Lord says in Romans 12,

*Rom 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ...[and v.19] <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

You hear that? Our revenge says we don't trust God to deal with our enemies. We take matters into our own hands instead of letting the Lord repay as he sees fit. So watch your anger! Don't let it percolate until you blow up at someone and sin against them and God. Because of that kind of thing, James told his fellow believers,

*Jas 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*

These last few weeks, I've been thinking about how hard it will be for my brother in law's family to process the murder of their parents and grandparents. Similarly, this past week, we've all heard of the shootings in a school in Texas. Life forces us into situations we'd never imagine ourselves surviving. Some people cope better than others. If we let our pain turn to anger and revenge, it eats us up. But if we can surrender it to the Lord, trust him to work justice and let him heal our broken hearts, he will get us through. But if we allow anger and revenge to boil and explode, the pain will only increase.

Samson's legitimate passion, even anger, was handled in illegitimate ways. His anger-turned-to-revenge got him into trouble. However, we cannot miss the fact that Samson is at least standing up against the Philistine people who are humiliating the people of God, which is more than we can say about the people of God themselves. And that brings us to our next point.

## **Israel's Humiliating Position**

Consider, secondly, then Israel's humiliating position.

Sadder than Samson's temper is the fact that Israel displays no passion regarding her relationship to the Philistines. The people have become spineless and faithless. Israel has forgotten who she is as God's people. She has even forgotten how great her God is! So rather than standing up to the power of the Philistines in the name of the Lord, the Israelites are dead afraid. You can say a lot of bad things about Samson, but you can't say he's afraid. He may not be the most faithful to the Lord in how he responds to the Philistines but he does stand up when the Philistines try to subdue him and all of Israel. He's a bit like young David when Israel's army is being taunted by Goliath.

Back to Judges now, did you notice what the people do? The Philistine army confronts the people of Judah at Lehi. In v.9 the Philistines tell the men of Judah that they want Samson. And the men of Judah waste no time in offering to hand Samson over. They are willing to give over one of their own—even God's appointed judge—to

the enemy without a fight. They are dead afraid. And they are dead wrong. It's quite a spectacle. Look at v.11:

*Jdg 15:11 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?" ...*

Sad, isn't it? Three thousand of his own people come to Samson and say in effect, "We are subjects of the Philistines. We bow to them. They want you and we're handing you over." The fact is that the people of Judah have forgotten that they are children and servants of the Lord. Instead, they have become servants of the Philistines!! They've surrendered to the enemy. Now they're even working for the enemy!

In the providence of God, Samson sees an opportunity to lead the battle against the Philistines. So he says to the 3000, "Yeah, okay, I'll go with you. But don't kill me." So they bind him with strong ropes and hand him over to the Philistines. Once he's in the sight and maybe the possession of the Philistines, the Spirit of the Lord comes on him again and he breaks those ropes like threads and proceeds to kill a thousand of the Philistines! Wow. Samson will not subject himself to the enemy! He has a mission from God to deliver Israel from subjection to the Philistines and back to trusting in God. So while his own people are weak in the face of the enemy, Samson—despite his obvious flaws—is faith-filled and brave. His life is on task here—God's task. He's failed before but he is seeking to do God's will this time in cleansing the Promised Land of the adulterous Philistines.

It's certainly not an easy comparison, but there is a real sense in which Samson reminds us of Jesus. Samson was handed over by his own people who failed to recognize him as God's deliverer for them. They had bowed to the Philistines instead of to the Lord. The New Testament tells us the same story with respect to Jesus and the Jews. Look what they say of Jesus when they seek to have him put to death. They said to Pilate in John 18:30,

*Jn 18:30 "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."*

Rejected by his own people. Handed over to the enemy in order to protect themselves. Subjecting themselves to the rule of Rome instead of to God. It happened to Israel in the days of Samson and again at the time of Jesus. Our holy and loving Lord, the perfect Son of God and our Saviour is despised and rejected by his own.

Could that ever happen to us? Could we be so uncertain of God's power that we'd work for the enemy because we think it would save our own skin? We live in a day when the way of God is being despised more and more. Our society's politicians and educators teach us that everyone has rights, even if those people dishonour God's word in doing what they do. When we stand up for God's word and his standards, people say, "Don't judge!" It is happening more and more that our woke government officials try to push their morality on to the church. And, often to keep the peace, when there really isn't peace anyway, we bow to their demands because we're afraid of the implications. It might be losing our tax exemption status as a church so we need to do what they say. Or think of how the government a few years ago made any group getting money for summer students agree to being pro-choice and pro-abortion when it comes to women's

rights. Some doctors have been losing privileges for not agreeing to be part of someone's plan to end their life with medical assistance. Will we stand for that or simply bow in fear to our governments?

Do we see Jesus our Saviour as Lord and King today? Do we remember that we are children of God and that we should bow to him and trust him in the face of injustice? Our calling is to be lights in the world of darkness. We must pray for courage to do whatever honours God rather than simply trying to keep the peace at all costs. Remember in Jeremiah's day, God complained that his people and even their leaders did not see the lie of the enemy but bought into it hook, line and sinker.

*Jer 6:14 They [the leaders] dress the wound of my people*

*as though it were not serious.*

*'Peace, peace,' they say,*

*when there is no peace.*

The danger is very real for us still today. I'm not fear mongering. But reminding us not to sell out to the messengers of evil in our day, no matter how beautifully or brilliantly they package their lies. We must know the truth and stand on it—because God is stronger than the enemy and he calls us to be his lighting light and salting salt in our world.

My friends, that's why we need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. We can't do this in our own strength. We must look at the one who was mistreated by his own people and unjustly sentenced to death by the courts of his day. He endured the mockery and torture and eventual death inflicted by others for our sake. He knows our struggles. Moreover, he is now ruling over the world at the right hand of his Father in heaven. That's what Ascension Day is about. Plus, he gives us the Holy Spirit to help us in these battles. The Spirit of the Lord is in us, even as he came upon Samson in powers.

The question is, do we prefer to live in the humiliating position of being under the rule of the enemy or do we want to live in the freedom of God that we've been given through Jesus Christ, no matter what others say or the pressures they put on us? Let us remember our exalted position as God's people and live out that.

### **God's Sovereign Purpose**

Now, to wrap it up, consider briefly, God's sovereign purpose. Reading this action-packed story of Samson's anger and revenge and seeing Israel's failure as well, we might lose sight of God's hand in this picture. But that would be a mistake. For history is always his-story.

Despite Samson's temper, God worked through him. He did not wait for Samson to be perfect. God used Samson's angry outburst to chastise the Philistines for their mistreatment of God's covenant people. He used Samson to fight for his people, even when the people wouldn't fight for themselves but were prepared to roll over and play dead in the face of the Philistines.

When the situation looks hopeless, when Samson is tied up with big ropes, when the Philistines smugly gloat about the strong man they have captured, when it looks like

evil has once again triumphed and God's people will be subjected to the Philistines, then God smiles and says, not so quick. Look at v.14 & 15.

*Jdg 15:14 As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. <sup>15</sup> Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.*

Who had the final say in this story? God never lost sight of the situation. God never stops caring and never stops working for the good of his people and his agenda for our lives and for the world. The situation in this story reminds us of Psalm 2 which says the nations plot in vain against the LORD and his Anointed One, like the Philistines against Samson and Israel. But verse 4 says,

*Ps 2:4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.*

God has the last laugh, you could say. God sees the puny minds of people thinking they are so great but when the Spirit of the Lord comes on Samson, 1000 Philistines are killed with a donkey bone in the hands of man filled with God's power! Again, they must swallow their pride as the power of God in one man is seen over our enemies.

Likewise, the power of God is seen nowhere more visibly than in the resurrection from the dead of one other man, Jesus. When the enemies of God and his agenda for the world thought they had put Jesus down once and for all, God laughed. Jesus rose from the dead and the world has never been the same!

In this day and age, we still have times when we feel defeated and feel like giving up or surrendering to the enemy. We all do. But don't do it. Instead, we must look to the empty tomb of Jesus by faith. That's where we must repeatedly point our covenant children as well. Look to Jesus the victor! Believe that God is still sovereignly working out all the details of our lives for his glory and our good. We are in good hands in the care of our sovereign God and Father through Jesus Christ our Lord. Bow before him and let your life serve his purposes.

Amen.

**Judges 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.

<sup>2</sup> "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."

<sup>3</sup> Samson said to them, "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them." <sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> When the Philistines asked, “Who did this?” they were told, “Samson, the Timnite’s son-in-law, because his wife was given to his companion.”

So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. <sup>7</sup> Samson said to them, “Since you’ve acted like this, I swear that I won’t stop until I get my revenge on you.” <sup>8</sup> He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

<sup>9</sup> The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. <sup>10</sup> 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.”

<sup>11</sup> 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.”

<sup>12</sup> They said to him, “We’ve come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines.”

Samson said, “Swear to me that you won’t kill me yourselves.”

<sup>13</sup> “Agreed,” they answered. “We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you.” So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock. <sup>14</sup> As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. 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. <sup>15</sup> Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.

<sup>16</sup> Then Samson said,

“With a donkey’s jawbone  
I have made donkeys of them.  
With a donkey’s jawbone  
I have killed a thousand men.”

<sup>17</sup> When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi.

<sup>18</sup> Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the Lord, “You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?”

<sup>19</sup> Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.

<sup>20</sup> Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.