

Thoughts From Other Minds:

But in so many ways, Samson's end is a picture, a shadow, of Jesus' death. ... both Samson and Jesus were betrayed by someone who had acted as a friend ... Both were handed over to the Gentile oppressors. Both were tortured and chained, and put on public display to be mocked. ... Both died with arms outstretched.

And both appeared completely struck down by their enemies, yet both in their death crushed their enemy—Samson, the Philistines and Dagon; Jesus, the ultimate enemy, Satan. As Samson brought the temple crashing down around Dagon and his followers, the spiritual power and apparent triumph of Dagon was reversed. Samson brought permanent alienation between the cultures, so that Israel would become distinct, no longer unknowingly and inevitably under the Philistines' power.

On the cross, Jesus brought the power of Satan to nothing, disarming him (Col 2:15). How did the cross achieve this? It took away the penalty for our idolatry—death—so that Satan could no longer successfully prosecute God's people. And it took away the power of sin in our lives, enabling the Spirit to live in us to break the lure of idols in our hearts. Samson prefigures Jesus' triumph, at the cost of his own death, over Satan. As Samson killed many as he died, so it took the death of Jesus to "kill" Satan—the unseen power of idolatry, and the power of death itself.

And both were saviours alone. Othniel and Ehud had rallied all of Israel to fight their oppressors (3:10, 27); Deborah and Barak took two tribes (4:10); Gideon had only 300. By Samson's time, sin had so devastated the people of God that no one ... was willing to give themselves to the liberation battle (15:9-13). In the same way as the Lord Jesus would, Samson did his act of deliverance alone, unlooked for and unasked for. ...

In short, we have in Samson, more than in any of the other judges, the pattern of "the victorious defeat." Rejected, beaten, chained, all alone, and finally dying under an avalanche of his enemies, Samson triumphed. God delivered his people through the victorious defeat of one saviour. ...

It is the gospel! Jesus became weak to become strong. But there is, of course, one last, crucial difference between Samson and Christ. With Samson's burial, his rule was over (16:31). His story was finished. But with Jesus' burial, in many ways the story had only just begun. He rules beyond his grave, not just before it. The One who became weak to save will rule in strength and power eternally.

Becoming and continuing as a Christian is about the same pattern—becoming weak to become strong. Only those who admit they are unrighteous receive the righteousness of Christ. Only those who know their life and strength are theirs purely because of grace are not living in the grip of fear, boredom, and despondency. Only those who know their own weakness are able to know God-given inner strength; the strength which enables us to avoid the pitfalls of Samson's life: pride, lust, anger, vengefulness and complacency.

Timothy Keller, *Judges For You*, pp. 163-165.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

31 July 2016

Sermon: "Samson – completing the beginning of salvation" (text: Judges 16:1-31)

Scripture: Judges 16:1-31

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Reflecting on Samson's marriage we remembered that Christians are not to be 'unequally yoked' with unbelievers in intimate relationships such as marriage or business or even friendship because believers and unbelievers are spiritually incompatible and such yoking ends in disharmony or compromising our faith.

Samson's marriage was 'from the Lord' (14:4); he intended to use it to begin to separate Israel from Philistine culture and society; Israel was the kingdom of God, but the Philistines represented 'the world', the kingdom of this world (Rev 11:15), those people whose god is 'the god of this world', Satan, and are under his power.

If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, then God 'has delivered us out of the domain of darkness' (Col 1:13) - and so we are to be separate from that domain, from the devil's kingdom, from 'the world'. This separation is in the realm of desires and loves; if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us (1 Jn 2:15-16).

1. Samson—presuming upon the grace of God

Samson was a Nazirite (= separated). Numbers ch. 6 provides for voluntary limited Naziritiship; men and women could take a vow to be separate from grapes and grape products, to let their hair grown uncut and not to go near a dead body.

God appointed Samson a Nazirite from birth (Jdgs 13:3-5). Some might say this wasn't fair—let Samson choose; but God is our creator, and it is his right to do with us as he wills. If we are believers, God chose us before time (Eph 1:3-5; Gal 1:15).

God chose Samson—but he was wilful. He bore the sign of his separation, uncut hair, but in other things he did what was right in his own eyes; he saw a Philistine woman, and wanted her; he was in a vineyard, and in contact with a dead lion.

He was in Timnah, putting on a drinking feast, and he killed thirty men for their clothes. Samson didn't practise Nazirite separation, and yet the Lord didn't leave him, but gave him victory and judgeship.

Samson presuming even more on the grace of God. He is in Gaza, the capital city of the Philistines, firstly by his choice, and then as a captive (v. 21). But what was Samson, the enemy of the Philistines, doing in Gaza?

What was right in his own eyes! There he saw a prostitute and went in to her. Gaza was a dangerous place for Samson, spiritually, morally, physically; his going there was testing God, something we are not to do (Matt 4:7).

Yet when the Gazites tried to kill him the Lord did not leave him; Samson was able to break out by taking the city gates with him and carrying them about 40

miles, uphill! We can imagine him laughing as he went, for he had escaped and taken the gates that were to hold him with him!

But then his presumption takes a more dangerous turn; he loves Delilah, and moves in with her! People say, “What’s the harm in it?” The harm is that the relationship lacks commitment and permanence, and that it puts God against us, for he established marriage as the precondition to sharing house and bed (Heb 13:4).

While Samson was strong enough to carry the gates of Gaza forty miles uphill he was strong enough to break the bonds of his desire for Delilah—and this unequal yoke was not merely a spiritual danger; it exposed him to his enemies, who bribed Delilah to find out how he could be overpowered (vs. 5-6).

What happened only makes sense if Samson presumed that the Lord would be with him no matter what. He knew what she was up to from the first; he said ‘if *they* bind me ...’ (v. 7). He should have fled, as Joseph fled Potiphar’s wife, and as we ought flee sexual immorality (2 Tim 2:21-22) - but instead, he lied.

However, he snapped the bowstrings easily; but then instead of fleeing he lied again: ‘if they bind me with new ropes’. He must have known she would try them, but it was lie or flee, but bound by desire and presuming on the Lord he lied again. Then she played the love card (v. 15), and under pressure he told her the truth.

Weak Samson! He was destroyed by the flame of his desire and her desire for Philistine silver; shaved of his seven locks of hair, when he awoke he thought the Lord would still be with him—but he did not know that the Lord had left him (v. 20). The Philistines gouged out his eyes and put him in prison in Gaza to grind at the mill.

The Lord left him because he had presumed one sin too far; his folly had removed from him the sign of his separation to the Lord, and so the Lord separated himself from him. Desire of the eyes had led Samson into sin and bondage, but now he was blind; but he would be a Nazirite till death—and his hair began to grow!

2. Samson—restored by the grace of God

God had not finished with Samson; in prison he had begun the journey towards repentance and renewed faith in God and renewed usefulness as a Nazirite. The Philistines attribute their victory over him to their god (vs. 23-24).

But to humiliate Samson further they bring him out of prison to entertain them. But this is now repentant, restored, forgiven Samson. He asks the young man who led him by the hand to let him feel the pillars—and then he prays, and his prayer is heard; he dies with the Philistines, killing more in his death than in his life.

His story is about the Lord whose name is wonderful and who works wonders through frail sinful wayward people. We learn much from him about the dangers of the unequal yoke and of presuming upon God; we are encouraged for the Holy Spirit includes him among those who through faith were made strong out of weakness; while life lasts the way to the Father is always open through repentance and faith.

Rev Peter Phillips, Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge, 1 Warrnambool Road, Terang, 3264.

Phone: (03) 5592 1041 Mobile 0407 072 991 Email: peterwphillips@bigpond.com

My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why does separation lie at the very heart of Samson’s story? (Judges 13:2-7; Numbers 6:1-21).
2. What was the difference between ordinary Naziriteship and Samson’s being a Nazirite? What do we say from the scriptures to anyone who says this is not fair, that Samson ought to have been allowed to choose for himself? (cf. also Eph 1:3-5; Gal 1:15).
3. What doings of Samson in the early part of his history indicate that he took his Naziriteship rather lightly? How is this trend continued into the latter part of his history? How does this reveal presumption on Samson’s part?
4. When Samson became aware that Delilah was trying to do him harm what should he have done? What should we do when tempted to sexual sins? (2 Tim 2:21-22). Why didn’t Samson do as he ought to have done?
5. Why does the historian mention that Samson’s hair began to grow again? How is the Samson who prays for strength different from the Samson captured by the Philistines? (Heb 11:32-34) When and how does this encourage us?