

Spring Message Series: Samson: “The Lord’s Spirit began to move...”

Three Messages: May 13, 20, 27

Series Text: “The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. The Lord’s Spirit began to move him.” Judges 13:24-25a

Series Blurb:

Today we start our spring series on the biblical strong man, Samson. Although Samson struggled to be faithful to God, God still used him in amazing ways! This series we’ll see Samson as a negative example (don’t make his mistakes!) but also as a witness that God uses people who struggle to stay close to God. We all have some Samson in us! We need to hear that although we struggle, God gives us great abilities and never gives up on us.

Sun., May 13: Mother’s Day

Message: Samson 1: The Mother without a Name

Scripture: Judges 13:1-25

Text: “The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. The Lord’s Spirit began to move him.” Judges 13:24-25a

Memory Verse: [From Echo] -Andrew

Children’s Lesson: Kids and weight lifting - Erik & David

Blurb: This Sunday, Mother’s Day, we begin our spring message series on Samson, the confusing strong man of the Bible. One quarter of the Samson story is actually about his mother! Samson, throughout his life, has four involved relationships with women. The first is the loving mother who raised him. She is the example of a faithful, godly woman. The other relationships Samson has with women fail miserably. So we begin with his mother, and our mothers. How has your mother been a godly example and witness?

Call to Worship: *Stronger* -Sanctify

Welcome: -Pastor David

Introduction & Love.Grow.Serve.

Mother’s Day!

Mothers are the strongest people on earth. Super heroes!

They can change history, go without sleep for days, and love people no one else can!

Think of your own mother...couldn’t she ask you do nearly anything?

Today we begin our series on the biblical character of Samson.

We think of him as the strongest person ever. But today we find someone even stronger than Samson: his mother!

Today during our opening worship set, Erik and I are going to ask kids to come up to work with the weights. We’ll call you up. But then, later, we’ll have kids come BACK up to try an experiment.

Memory Verse

Worship Music: - Sanctify

Reckless Love

Invite kids to come up and work with the weights.

All My Fountains

No Longer Slaves

Worship Prayer - Amanda

Offering: *Different* - Sanctify

Love Moment: “Questions without Answers” - Dramatic reading in honor of Mother’s Day

Prayers: In honor of Mother’s Day - Pastor David

Kid’s Moment: -David

Kids, come back up...we’re going to try some weights for the very strong.

Do you know why you lift weights? To build your muscles and become very strong!

Erik is going to help you each try to do a bench press of some very heavy weights.

[Kids try]

So, these are very heavy weights, right? Could you lift them? [No.]

Do you know who can lift these? Erik can! Go ahead, Erik, show us.

Wow! Erik, what’s the most you ever benched?

The world record for a human lifting by Guinness Book of World records is 3 tons!

Do you know who could lift double that?

Thor! Or the Hulk! Or Superman.

But there was a real person who lived long ago, in the Bible, who was the strongest person ever!

His name was Samson. He was so strong that he killed a lion with his bare hands.

He also lifted up a city gate, like the gate of a castle, that weighted about 6 tons—that’s like 4 cars!—and then he carried it 30 miles away!!

Samson was pretty strong, right!

How do you think Samson was so strong? God gave him that power!

Did you know that God gives us all special strength? We all have a superpower, really.

We can each do extra special things when God bends down to help us.

Remember Erik helped you bench the weights when it was too heavy?

That’s what God does for us!

On Mother’s Day, we remember that our moms do super strong things for us, like loving us when we don’t act very loveable. God helps them never give up on us! They have super strength that way!

So, when we hear the story of Samson, I want us all to remember that God gives us each special powers, special gifts.

But we have to be sure to ask God to help us, and learn to depend on Him.

Prayer for strength!

Message:

PP#1: Samson: The Lord's Spirit Began to Move. The Mother without a Name.

“The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. The Lord's Spirit began to move him.” Judges 13:24-25a

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PP#2: *Image from* <https://www.practicalbible.com/news/samson-and-the-philistine-gate>

Today we begin our spring message series on the biblical person of Samson.

Now, I have to confess to you, I don't like this series. It's because I don't like the biblical figure of Samson. I read his story back in the Old Testament book of Judges, and I just shake my head and think, “What is this man doing in the Bible?” Yes, he was famous for his strength, but he squandered it! He did not follow God's leading. He didn't listen to wisdom, he was beguiled by women, had a bad temper, made choice after choice out of his selfishness, and spent his entire adult life seeking vengeance. I mean, if I were writing the Bible, I'd leave him out!

But there he is, in all his failures. I was talking with Matt Borst yesterday at their new daughter's dedication, and I said that it's stories like this in the Bible that kinda prove that the Bible wasn't created by people. If religious people wanted a holy book, they would not have included the story of Samson.

And the New Testament, in Hebrews 11, lists him as one of the great men of the past! Great? Great at what? Mistakes?

So, I admit that in all the years of my pastoral ministry, I have never preached on Samson. I've avoided him. It's easier to talk about, you know, Moses.

So, last fall, when I laid out the messages for the year, I made a point of including a series on Samson. You see, pastors can get stuck talking about what they like, what we prefer. But all of the Bible is Scripture, and all is good for our spiritual growth. So, I decided to include this story and stop avoiding it.

That was a great idea last fall. Now that it's here, I would like to go back to my “fall self” and smack me upside the head! What was I thinking? Oh well, here we go. I have to trust that God has a message here for us, and that we need it here and now. I hope the Holy Spirit does some preaching this morning, because David doesn't have much to say!

PP#3: *Image of Samson and Delilah*

Now, Samson is kinda known as a strong man. Much has been made of comparing Samson to the Greek mythical character of Hercules. Yes, there are some similarities, but they do not share a common legend. If anything, Hercules—a story that arose much later—was based on Samson.

We may also remember Samson in his famous romance with Delilah. But that was one-sided, as she sold him out for money. He kinda redeemed himself in the end when he pushed the pillars and made the building fall, but his motivation for that was revenge.

So, this morning, let's go to the beginning of his story, which you might not know. It's Judges 13. And the story of Samson starts with a story about his mother...his father, too, but it's really about his mother.

This is back in the time after the Israelites had been led out of Egypt by Moses and had settled into the Promised Land under Joshua. Each of the tribes of Israel settled in their own area of the Promised Land, but it was before the time when they came together under a central government and unified kingdom.

For a period of around 300 years, the Israelites had a cycle of trusting in God and enjoying peace and prosperity, but then falling away from God and so God let their enemies overtake and oppress them. The people would then repent, turn back to God and ask for restoration. God would raise up a military leader, called a judge—it's not what we think of a judge today—who would call the people back to faithfulness and drive out their occupiers. Then, the people would follow God again for awhile and enjoy peace and prosperity. But after a generation, they would fall away again, and the cycle would start over. The book of Judges records 12 of these judges, one of whom is Samson. Incidentally, another was a woman, Deborah. She's kind of a Joan of Arc figure.

PP#4: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

1 The Israelites again did things that the Lord saw as evil, and He handed them over to the Philistines for forty years.

2 Now there was a certain man from Zorah, from the Danite clan, whose name was Manoah. His wife was unable to become pregnant and had not given birth to any children.

3 The Lord's messenger appeared to the woman

Anyway, let's look at Judges 13. "The Israelites again did things that the Lord saw as evil, and He handed them over to the Philistines for forty years." The Philistines were Israel's arch enemy for centuries. It wasn't until David, who as a boy defeated the Philistine giant Goliath, who finally conquered them when he was king. Their main area is present day the Gaza Strip. Verse 2, "Now there was a certain man from Zorah, from the Danite clan, whose name was Manoah. [Zorah was roughly half way between modern day Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.] His wife was unable to become pregnant and had not given birth to any children. The Lord's messenger appeared to the women"

Stop there a minute. You will notice that this woman's name is never given. Strange, really, because this whole chapter is actually about her. The man is named, but not the wife. Now, we may think that this is because of ancient patriarchal culture that valued men over women. But actually, if you look closely, it is an intentional literary technique. Manoah is named. Samson is named. Even Samson's lover Delilah is named. But not Samson's mother.

Why? It's because this woman is actually being presented as the person we are supposed to be like. When this story was told, women and mothers of Israel were being invited to see themselves as this woman, to be like her. Even men were supposed to identify with her. She is nameless so that we can have it be our name. Everyone else is named, because they are their own persons. Samson's mother, however, is the archetype of the faithful mother and God-follower.

So women, today on Mother's Day, I want you to see yourself as this woman. And let's see what that means.

PP#5: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

3 The Lord's messenger appeared to the woman and said to her, "Even though you've been unable to become pregnant and haven't given birth, you are now pregnant and will give birth to a son! 4 Now be careful not to drink wine or brandy or to eat anything that is ritually unclean, 5 because you are pregnant and will give birth to a son. Don't allow a razor to shave

his head, because the boy is going to be a nazirite for God from birth. He'll be the one who begins Israel's rescue from the power of the Philistines."

Back to the story. Verse 3, "The Lord's messenger appeared to the woman [notice, not the man] and said to her, 'Even though you've been unable to become pregnant and haven't given birth, you are now pregnant and will give birth to a son! Now be careful not to drink wine or brandy or to eat anything that is ritually unclean, because you are pregnant and will give birth to a son. Don't allow a razor to shave his head, because the boy is going to be a nazirite for God from birth. He'll be the one who begins Israel's rescue from the power of the Philistines.'"

So, Manoah is off in the field doing his farming, or perhaps taking a nap or something, and the angel of God appears to the woman. She hasn't had any children, which was very hard for her we can be sure, in a culture where women's value came through childbearing. It's still equally hard for women today who want children and can't bear them.

Well, the angel wants her to know that God has a plan. It's not just to make it possible for her to bear a child, but this child is going to be the next judge who will begin to push back the Philistine occupiers. Careful readers will notice that Samson actually doesn't ever drive the Philistines out. But notice the word here: he'll "begin" Israel's rescue. That he does.

The angel invokes the ancient nazirite vow, described in Numbers 6. The vow is described as a way for a person to voluntarily dedicate themselves to God more intentionally or earnestly for a set time and for a specific purpose, usually until something happens or comes to pass. The vow includes three requirements: 1. Abstain from alcohol and all grape products, 2. Don't touch anything unclean like a dead body, and 3. Don't cut your hair.

Well, the angel tells the woman, as an expression of her faith and being dedication to God, to keep the nazirite vow until her baby is born. But the baby is to be unique. He is to live in the nazirite vow *his entire life!* This is a new idea, not described in Numbers 6, and is probably why Manoah asks for more clarification on this.

PP#6: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

6 Then the woman went and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and he looked like God's messenger—very scary! I didn't ask him where he was from, and he didn't tell me his name. 7 He said to me, 'You are pregnant and will give birth to a son, so don't drink wine or brandy or eat anything that is ritually unclean, because the boy is going to be a nazirite for God from birth until the day he dies.'"

Well, the woman runs off to tell her husband the good news. Verse 6, "Then the woman went and told her husband, 'A man of God came to me, and he looked like God's messenger—very scary! I didn't ask him where he was from, and he didn't tell me his name. He said to me, 'You are pregnant and will give birth to a son, so don't drink wine or brandy or eat anything that is ritually unclean, because the boy is going to be a nazirite for God from birth until the day he dies.'"

PP#7: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

8 Manoah asked the Lord, "Please, my Lord," he said, "let the man of God whom you sent come back to us once more, so he can teach us how we should treat the boy who is to be born."

9 God listened to Manoah, and God's messenger came once more to the woman. She was sitting in the field, but her husband Manoah wasn't with her. 10 So the woman hurriedly

ran and informed her husband. She said to him, “The man who came to me the other day has just appeared to me.” 11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. . . .

So, she already grasps that it is God’s angel. But her husband doesn’t get it. He prays and asks for God to send the person back to explain this nazarite-from-birth, permanent vow, thing. God answers his prayer, but sends the messenger back *to his wife*. This is about her, after all. When he appears, she runs off to go *fetch* her husband, who follows her back like a little puppy dog. Ancient Israelites who were hearing this story would smile at this image. The husband, who was supposed to be so important, is left out of the loop. The angel keeps appearing to the woman, who has to go invite the man in to meet the angel.

PP#8: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

11 Manoah got up and followed his wife. He came to the man and said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to this woman?” “I am,” he replied.

12 Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what should be the rules for the boy and how he should act?”

13 The Lord’s messenger answered Manoah, “The woman should be careful to do everything that I told her. 14 She must not consume anything that comes from the grapevine, drink wine or brandy, or eat anything that is ritually unclean. She must be careful to do everything I have commanded her.”

He doesn’t seem to believe his wife when she introduces her husband to the angel, for he asks him to confirm it himself. And when Manoah asks for more information, the angel only repeats what he had already told his wife. All the information comes through her!

PP#9: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

15 Manoah said to the Lord’s messenger, “Please let us persuade you to stay so we can prepare a young goat for you.”

16 But the Lord’s messenger replied to Manoah, “If you persuaded me to stay, I wouldn’t eat your food. If you prepare an entirely burned offering, offer it to the Lord.” Indeed, Manoah didn’t know that he was the Lord’s messenger. 17 Manoah said to the Lord’s messenger, “What’s your name, so that we may honor you when your words come true?”

18 The Lord’s messenger responded to him, “Why do you ask my name? You couldn’t understand it.”

Then Manoah, who still doesn’t grasp that it’s an angel—verse 16—offers to make a meal for the angel: ancient middle-eastern hospitality, and upper Midwest America, too! Are you hungry? Can I make you a sandwich? How about some hot dish? The angel, however, suggests that rather than offering a meal of young goat, instead he ought to make that goat as a sacrifice *to God*...hint, hint! His wife was respectful enough to not ask the angel’s name. Manoah, who is clueless, asks his name.

PP#10: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

19 So Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered them on a rock to the Lord. While Manoah and his wife were looking, an amazing thing happened: 20 as the flame from the altar went up toward the sky, the Lord’s messenger went up in the altar’s flame. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell facedown on the ground. 21 The Lord’s

messenger didn't reappear to Manoah or his wife, and Manoah then realized that it had been the Lord's messenger.

When the sacrifice is burnt, the angel ascends up into the sky in the flames of the sacrifice. At this sight, Manoah and his wife bow down in worship. And then, when Manoah couldn't find the angel anywhere around, it finally dawns on him (even though his wife knew all along): this is a messenger sent from heaven from God! A little slow on the uptake, really!

PP#11: Judges 13:1-25 (CEB)

22 Manoah said to his wife, "We are certainly going to die, because we've seen God!"

23 But his wife replied to him, "If the Lord wanted to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted the entirely burned offering and grain offering from our hands. He wouldn't have shown us all these things or told us all of this now."

24 The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. 25 The Lord's Spirit began to move him when he was in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

And then, when it finally dawns on him, he freaks out! Verse 22, "Manoah said to his wife, 'We are certainly going to die, because we've seen God!'"

So, it's up to the steady, perceptive, nameless woman to calm down the anxious man—do you see the role reversal here?—and speak words of reasoned faithfulness. Verse 23, "But his wife replied to him, 'If the Lord wanted to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted the entirely burned offering and grain offering from our hands. He wouldn't have shown us all these things or told us all of this now.'"

And she fulfills her vow, because God then kept His promise and her son was born. Verse 24, "The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. [Notice, she named him! Not the father, as was tradition. She, the faithful one, is calling the shots.] The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. [It seems she was a good mother, too.] The Lord's Spirit began to move him when he was in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol." He was a young adult when God calls him to fulfill his special destiny.

PP#12: *Image of Samson's mom listening to the angel*

But we'll save that for next week. Up until now, this story is about Samson's unnamed mother. And things are going pretty well, thanks to her. Samson doesn't do very well, and his father is rather clueless, but thanks to his mother, we can find some biblical application for our lives today.

This is Scripture. God wanted this story preserved for us to hear it today. Yes, the Samson story as a whole is memorable and entertaining. But God wanted it passed down so He could use it to instruct and teach His people, leading us into closer relationship with Him.

And at the beginning of Samson's story, we are given this amazing woman as our role model, our example of a faithful, godly woman. All the other characters in the story, from her husband, to her famous son, to his three different women, are all contrasted to her. It is her faithfulness, and the faithfulness of God, that causes the good in this unfolding story.

It is this mother who helps us in our walk with God today. She is one of our spiritual mothers that God gives to us in Scripture.

PP#13: The Mother without a Name

1. Open to God

Three quick ways she is our spiritual mother: First, she is open to God. We see her accept the angel right from the beginning. The contrast of her husband—who behaves more like we might—really highlights how remarkable she is. Although she is kid-less, She seems to have an openness to God anyway: a quick receptivity, a willingness to accept what God can do. Perhaps that's why the angel appears to her. And that becomes a model for us. How can we be more like her, more open and expectant, even when we don't have things going our way? Do we get mad at God, or wallow in pity? Or are we open to whatever God wants to do with us or in our lives? She was out in the field, helping her husband with the family business. She was still doing all that she could. She also calms her husband and helps him focus on what God is doing. She points it out. She can see it, when he can't. She assumes leadership because of her openness to God. If you are a woman, this amazing woman can help guide your openness to God. Actually, she can do this for all of us, too!

PP#14: The Mother without a Name

1. Open to God

2. Obedient

Two: she is obedient. We see from her son's birth that she accepts her special vow and chooses to do things God's way. I'm sure it must have been weird to follow the restrictions, and she may have stuck out in public. But she chose to follow God's path. Again, we'll see Samson contrast with this. But here she teaches us to boldly live obediently to God, even when it costs us something, and even when we stick out. There is blessing in obedience. God is able to work in our lives more as He intends. Can you hear our spiritual mother telling us to be careful to choose God's way? It brings about miracles, she says, and she knows of what she speaks!

PP#15: The Mother without a Name

1. Open to God

2. Obedient

3. Obscure

And one more: she lives and dies in obscurity. She remains nameless so that all of us can see ourselves in her, walking more closely as faithful followers of God. You may not have amazing strength like Samson. You may not be famous, or renowned, or lifted up as a giant of the faith. You may wonder if anything you do has any worth or value. You may remain nameless, and inconsequential in human records of history. But the story of this woman is an encouragement to you, that when you are faithful, open, and obedient, God will bring great things. You may not get the glory...not even be named. But I don't think she cares one lick now in glory. She was excited to be used by God, to be a part of His bigger plan, and she can say before God, "Thank you for choosing me, using me, bringing about great things." She needs no recognition, and neither do we. All we do is to please God, not make a name for ourselves. And when we do, God does great things through us that we can't even see! Like this woman, we want all that we do to point to God.

PP#16: Samson: The Lord's Spirit Began to Move. The Mother without a Name.

"The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. The Lord's Spirit began to move him." Judges 13:24-25a

Hmmm...maybe God does have some things to say here in this Samson story. I guess I need to be more open to what He is saying through this story, more obedient to use passages that I may not choose, and be quick to step back and let God speak.

How about you? What is God saying to you through this story?

Thank you God for our mothers, and for all the women who have mothered us. And a special thank you today, God, for this nameless mother, who nurtures us in a closer walk with you.

Amen.

Closing Song: *Strong Enough to Save* -Sanctify

Memory Verse:

Announcements: -David

Benediction: -David