

Sun., May 26:

Message: Samson 3: “The Lord’s Spirit began to move...” Building from Rubble

Scripture: Judges 16, various

Text: Judges 16:17b “I’ll be like every other person.”

Memory Verse: [From Echo] -Andrew

Children’s Lesson: Tim Hawkins spoof on *Hey, There, Delilah* -Andrew

Blurb: The story of Samson ends with a big crash, which also ends his life. The mighty Samson found himself helpless as a result of his own foolishness. Yet, in desperation, he prayed, “Remember me, O Lord!” The true hero of the Samson story is actually God, who answers Samson’s prayer. God is still our true hero, for He still answers our desperate prayers. Although Samson reminds us of how we fall short of God’s plans for our lives, he also becomes a vivid testimony to make God our Hero!

Call to Worship: *White Flag* -Sanctify

Welcome: -Pastor David

Introduction

Love.Grow.Serve.

Memory Verse:

“Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” -1 Peter 5:8

Worship Music: - Sanctify

The Way

I Want a Principle Within

Cover the Earth

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Offering: *Give Thanks* - Sanctify

Prayers: In honor of Memorial Day - Pastor David

Grow Moment: Summer Grow Groups - Pastor David

Kid’s Moment: *Hey, there, Delilah* - Pastor Andrew

Message: Samson: “The Lord’s Spirit Began to Move.” Building from Rubble. -Pastor David

PP#1: Samson: “The Lord’s Spirit Began to Move.” Building from Rubble

“I’ll be like every other person.” -Judges 16:17b

Samson: “The Lord’s Spirit Began to Move.” Building from Rubble. Judges 16:17b Samson answered Delilah, “I’ll be like every other person.”

Samson is an anti-hero. Yes, he's famously recorded as being the strong man in the Bible, and yes, he does many amazing feats, but as we've been following his story closely, we're seeing that: he doesn't follow God's law, he doesn't follow his Nazarite vow, and all his amazing feats are done selfishly, or foolishly, or out of revenge.

PP#2: The Samson Story:

Prolog: Samson's birth (Judges 13)

Samson's wedding and aftermath (Judges 14-15)

Samson in Gaza (Judges 16:1-3)

Samson & Delilah (Judges 16:4-22)

Epilog: Samson's death (Judges 16:23-31)

Let's look at the center episode of Samson's story. It's in Judges 16. The first chapter of Samson's story, Judges 13, is about his mother and father and his amazing birth. The next two chapters, Judges 14-15, are about Samson's disastrous wedding and the aftermath that escalated into all-out war. Did Samson learn from his mistakes and change his ways? Well, let's look at Judges 16.

PP#3: Judges 16 (CEB)

1 One day Samson traveled to Gaza. While there, he saw a prostitute and had sex with her.
 2 The word spread among the people of Gaza, "Samson has come here!" So they circled around and waited in ambush for him all night at the city gate. They kept quiet all night long, thinking, We'll kill him at the first light in the morning. 3 But Samson slept only half the night. He got up in the middle of the night, grabbed the doors of the city gate and the two gateposts, and pulled them up with the bar still across them. He put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the hill that is beside Hebron.

Verse 1, "One day Samson traveled to Gaza." Now remember, Gaza is center of the Philistines, the occupiers that God called Samson to repel. Did Samson go there to see his enemy and push them off the Israelites? What does his eye see? Remember last time when he traveled to Timna. What did he see in that Philistine stronghold? A beautiful woman, right? And oh the mess it caused. Well, what happens this time? "While there, he saw a prostitute and had sex with her."

Really? Last time his eye landed on a beautiful woman. At least then he tried to pursue marriage. This time, he skips God's commands all together! And don't forget, not only is this a sin, she's also unclean! His nazarite vow also prohibited him. But, it seems no big deal to Samson. He's still just doing whatever he wants, and still thinks with other organs than his brain.

But this time the Philistines have it out for him. He's their enemy. Verse 2, "The word spread among the people of Gaza, "Samson has come here!" So they circled around and waited in ambush for him all night at the city gate. They kept quiet all night long, thinking, we'll kill him at the first light in the morning." So, the gate will be his downfall. He may be strong, but by then he'll be well worn out! So, they'll get him there: at the gate, in the morning, the gate will be his demise!

But, it seems, they underestimated his strength again, in this area as well! Verse 3, "But Samson ["slept"] only half the night. [My, what a virile (veer-al) hunk! But wait! Not only is he not worn out and therefore not sleeping,] He got up in the middle of the night, grabbed the doors of the city gate and the two gateposts, and pulled them up with the bar still across them. He put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the hill that is beside Hebron." [HEB-ron]

PP#4: Image from <https://www.practicalbible.com/news/samson-and-the-philistine-gate>

Ladies, you're supposed to be impressed. Gents, you're supposed to be jealous! That's how the Hebrew narrative is working here. Notice, there's no phrase here saying how God's spirit came upon him. That happened when he was angry. But this time, he's crafty. He knows they're lying in wait for him at the gate. So what does he do? Not only does he give them the slip, he takes the gate with him! He removes the place that they had identified would be his downfall. It doesn't overpower him, he overpowers it! Conservative estimates are that this kind of gate weighed 6 tons, let alone getting the doorposts out of the ground and torn away from the wall! And then, his strength is so inexhaustible, that he carries the gate deep into Israelite territory, some 30 miles, and puts it on top of the hill next to the burial place of the Jewish patriarch and matriarchs.

So, Samson is still the same: impetuous, base, carnal, rash, unrestrained. God must have been shaking His head!

PP#5: Building from Rubble

1. See: How am I like Samson?

I want to stop here and make the connection from Samson to our lives. We can see in Samson, as an anti-hero, what not to do. And although we join God in shaking our heads at Samson, this story is given in Scripture so that we can also ask ourselves, "In what ways am I like Samson?" Ouch: this story just went from entertaining—like, you can't stop watching a disaster as it's happening to someone else—to dangerous! This is not just a story of someone long ago. This is Scripture, and God inspires it's reading just like God inspired its writing and preservation. God speaks to us through this story. We see such a clear example of selfishness in Samson, and the Holy Spirit uses that to help us see [pun!] how we do the same thing.

Who are your Philistines? What controls us, keeps us locked in oppression, seems undefeatable? Is there an addiction in your life? A power over you? Is it a desire for the most edgy devices, an allegiance to play it safe, to fit in, look impressive, have an exciting life? God equips you with the strength you need to defeat that oppression. What are you doing with those gifts? Are you using them as God intends? Do you dabble with your enemy, indulge, like Samson flirted with the Philistine women, rather than defeating it? Maybe your oppressor is unhealthy relationships, and you are more like Samson than you want to admit. Perhaps, in Samson, you see your anger causing you to behave stupidly and throw away your gifts.

Samson is our anti-hero, and he helps us see the anti-hero in us. This story calls us to reflect on how we are like Samson, to get real, be honest, and when we can see that, then we can then make changes and become more like God intends for us to be...and not end up like Samson!

Now I'm finding the Samson story to be challenging in a different way! Are you with me?

Last week, we learned that God, no matter if we live obediently or not, will still make His plans work out. And God wanted the Philistines routed. Samson is stuck on Philistine women. And, it seems, God weaves a path even though Samson does not live faithfully.

PP#6: Judges 16 (CEB)

4 Some time after this, in the Sorek Valley, Samson fell in love with a woman whose name was Delilah. 5 The rulers of the Philistines confronted her and said to her, "Seduce him and find out what gives him such great strength and what we can do to overpower him, so that we can tie him up and make him weak. Then we'll each pay you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

So now, the stage is set for Delilah. Judges 16:4, “Some time after this, in the Sorek Valley (that served as the boarder between the Philistines and Samson’s Tribe of Dan], Samson fell in love with a woman whose name was Delilah.” Although it doesn’t say explicitly, the narrative seems to imply that she was a Philistine. Now, this is the only one of the four females in Samson’s life who is named. His mother, the virtuous Hebrew woman, is not named because she is the prototype for a faithful, godly woman. Samson’s wife is not named, for she is a pawn of the events. The harlot is not named, for she is a faceless toy that Samson used. But Delilah, well, she is the one, the only one, it seems, that Samson truly falls in love with. He is smitten, twitterpatted! And she is named, here, it seems, because she plays a very decisive role in this story. She is one of only three people named in this whole story. We are supposed to pay attention to her.

The Philistine leaders realize that Samson now has a weakness, a woman he truly loves. So, a group them go to her and each offer her the buying power of what would be today a half million dollars. Tradition says there were five of them. That’s a quarter of a billion dollars!

Now, as the story goes, it appears that Delilah didn’t return Samson’s love, or at least loved money more than Samson. So, three times she asks him the secret to his strength. Samson, evidently, thought that these were little love games that Delilah was playing with him. Fun, and sport! What a laugh. He didn’t know that there was an ambush waiting each time.

PP#7: Judges 16 (CEB)

15 Delilah said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t trust me? Three times now you’ve made a fool out of me and not told me what gives you such great strength!” 16 She nagged him with her words day after day and begged him until he became worn out to the point of death.

17 So he told her his whole secret. He said to her, “No razor has ever touched my head, because I’ve been a nazirite for God from the time I was born. If my head is shaved, my strength will leave me, and I’ll become weak. I’ll be like every other person.”

Well, after three times, she really puts on a show. “How can you say you love me, when you won’t trust me?” “You’ve made a fool out of me!” And then, verse 16, “She nagged him with her words day after day and begged him until he became worn out to the point of death.”

Notice the wording: Samson is worn out! Delilah is the one who wears down the strong man with indefatigable stamina! Delilah is his kryptonite! Cutting his hair didn’t make him weak, her nagging did! His hair was just the consequence.

PP#8: Judges 16 (CEB)

19 She got him to fall asleep with his head on her lap. Then she called a man and had him shave off the seven braids of Samson’s hair. He began to weaken, and his strength left him. 20 She called out, “Samson, the Philistines are on you!” He woke up from his sleep and thought, I’ll escape just like the other times and shake myself free. But he didn’t realize that the Lord had left him. 21 So the Philistines captured him, put out his eyes, and took him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze chains, and he worked the grinding mill in the prison. 22 But the hair on his head began to grow again right after it had been shaved.

Now, you’re supposed to be shocked at Delilah’s cold heart. She strokes his head in her lap as he blissfully drifts off to sleep. He’s dreaming of beautiful Delilah, while she is plotting his murder!

One part of this story I just can't solve, is why is Samson's physical strength is linked to his hair? His hair is only part of his nazirite vow. But so was not touching anything unclean. He didn't lose his strength when he ate the honey or slept with the harlot. I can't answer this one, but it seems that God was honoring Samson's self-awareness. Samson linked his strength to his hair, and so, therefore, it was. God was holding him accountable to the part he did understand and take seriously.

When they capture him, they gouge out his eyes. This is poetic justice! His eyes had led him astray all his life, and he chose what he saw rather than what God said. As a listener to this story, we are supposed to "get" this irony, and wonder if now, finally, Samson may be able to focus on what he is supposed to. All the consequences of his selfish living reduce him to a slave work animal. We're supposed to shake our heads and feel regret for a talented and gifted life squandered. Follow God, people, follow God's way. Don't be like Samson, our anti-hero!

PP#9: Building from Rubble

1. See: How am I like Samson?
2. See: Samson is like Israel!

This story of Samson was compiled in its final form—the story that was passed down through generations orally was finally written, most likely—during the time of the Kingdom of Judah, or during the time of the Jewish Exile in Babylon. It was compiled by the priests, who saw in Samson not just a calling for each of us to reflect on our lives, but for the nation of Israel to see how it had lived its national life like Samson. It did not live out the covenant, the vows it had made with God. It did not serve its calling as a light to the nations, but instead it had squandered its special status and gifts on selfish living. It had turned it back on God's law and had not lived faithfully or obediently. It had lusted after adulterous relationships with other gods and other nations. Samson serves as a backdrop for the whole nation of Israel, and how it was suffering the consequences of its self-indulgence and unfaithfulness.

For us, today, this backdrop continues, serving as a critique of God's Church on earth. The Christian Church flirts in adulterous affairs with worldly pleasures, modern idols, and passing trends. We place our eyes on what we like, rather than on obedience. Beware the outcome of Samson, this story warns us, and the Church today!

And so, both we who see ourselves in Samson, and as God's people who struggle to remain faithful, we look fervently in the Samson story for some hope of redemption, for God's forgiveness, for hope in the future.

Samson can no longer see beautiful women, for the first time in his life he has normal strength. He has suffered humiliation and defeat. He is worked like a slave-animal. He has lost his pride. Will this change him? Is there any hope in the future?

And notice, the story ends—verse 22—with that suggestive, ominous detail, "But the hair on his head began to grow back...." Dun-dun-duuuun!

PP#10: Judges 16 (CEB)

23 The rulers of the Philistines gathered together to make a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to hold a celebration. They cheered, "Our god has handed us Samson our enemy!" 24 When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has handed us our enemy, the very one who devastated our land and killed so many of our people." 25 At the height of the celebration, they said, "Call for Samson so he can perform for us!" So they called Samson from the prison, and he performed in front of them....

The Philistines finally have their public enemy #1, the only Hebrew they couldn't control. So, they throw a big celebration, and they make thank offerings to their god Dagon.

Now, if you have ever read any of the Bible, you know that this kind of situation really makes God angry. And they actually praise their god saying, "Our god has handed us Samson our enemy." Really? What actually happened is that Samson was a moron and didn't follow God's instructions. So, God withdrew His special strength from Samson. Dagon had nothing to do with it!

Then, they call to bring Samson into the temple so they can mock him and make sport of him. They chain him between the two central pillars so he's conveniently right in the middle of everyone.

Can you imagine God: sadness over Samson's continued selfishness, squandering the strength God had given him to use against the Philistines...the consequences of his actions reducing him to slavery and ridicule...the Philistines still victorious over His chosen people...God's chosen leader brought in and humiliated...Dagon given the credit, and praised as more powerful than Israel's God...all the Philistine leaders there, in one place? You just know, God is poised to act. But He looks over at pitiful Samson to see if there is anything more growing in him than his hair.

PP#11: Judges 16 (CEB)

28 Then Samson called out to the Lord, "Lord God, please remember me! Make me strong just this once more, God, so I can have revenge on the Philistines, just one act of revenge for my two eyes." 29 Samson grabbed the two central pillars that held up the temple. He leaned against one with his right hand and the other with his left. 30 And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" He strained with all his might, and the temple collapsed on the rulers and all the people who were in it. So it turned out that he killed more people in his death than he did during his life.

Evidently, there was! Samson grasps the advantage of his location. He craftily gets his hands on the two main support pillars. All the rulers of the Philistines were in the temple, and an additional 3,000 Philistines were on the roof, all there to mock Samson. And Samson prays to God. Verse 28. Again, it's a rough prayer, "Please God, let me have revenge on the Philistines and avenge my eyes!" At first I assumed it was Samson's anger at being blinded. But the more that I read this, I began to see [pun!] that Samson's prayer had a deeper level than just revenge. Remember all the imagery of sight and eyes throughout the story? I began to hear Samson's prayer more humbly, also including, "Let me avenge for all the ways my eyes have led me astray. Give me one more chance to defeat the Philistines like you called me to." And, verse 30 shows Samson truly humbled. He accepts his fate of dying with the enemy; he is no longer a pompous jerk. He relinquishes his self-indulgence.

PP#12: Building from Rubble

1. See: How am I like Samson?
2. See: Samson is like Israel!
3. See: God used Samson's defeat.

God is the real hero of this story. Samson—like us, and Israel, and the Church—continue on wayward paths, even destructive to ourselves. But notice how God stayed with him, even when he strayed. Notice how God listened to the rough prayers of a forgotten failure. Notice how God's original plan still happened. From the rubble of the destroyed temple, God built a new beginning. From Samson's defeat, the Philistines lost their key leadership. They were thrown into disarray. They lost a moral and numeric blow that set in motion the throwing off of the Philistine occupation during

the next generation. Samson didn't complete it like he was supposed to. But God took the rubble of his defeat and built the beginnings of a Philistine overthrow.

And, God then uses this story of failure and defeat to build into His people, from generation to generation, the witness that if God can use Samson, if God remained faithful to Samson, then God can use you, and will remain faithful to you.

It's not about Samson. It's about God. Is there hope when we really screw up our lives so badly that we get ourselves trapped in a mess? Will God answer our feeble prayers? Will God's plan still get accomplished? This story of Samson is told so that we can answer: Yes! Yes! Yes!

This Memorial Day weekend, I can't help but reflect on the lives of our country's soldiers who have died in battle and while serving our country. Many have died in foreign territories, hostile lands. They have fought against those who have threatened our country, our people, with oppression and occupation. And although I am careful not to use the Bible to reinforce nationalism and patriotism, I believe that the Bible—like this Samson story—proclaims that God builds from rubble. God brings life from death. Those who have died for our country have not died in vain. God uses them, their gift, as a blessing, to build something good for the future. It's about God, you see. And I see God still building from rubble.

PP#13: Judges 16 (CEB)

31 His brothers and his father's entire household traveled down, carried him back up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had led Israel for twenty years.

The last verse of the Samson story is a bit of a tribute. Although Samson died in foreign territory and seemed to be lost to his own people, the last verse says his family came, dug through the rubble, and found his body. They brought it back home and gave it a proper burial. Even though he had lived his adult life vexing and probably alienating his own family, they still claimed him and saw how God used him. He is still claimed as their leader, even though he was a complicated mess!

There's one last word here to you today. Sometimes we see only our mistakes, our failures, our defeats, and they become so heavy that we are sure we are nothing but lost. But Samson's family is a reminder for us to listen to others and hear the hope they see in us. When we despair thinking there is nothing good left in us, remember that there are others around you who still see God in you, God's gifts within you, and God's purpose for you. Listen to them!

Samson: why is this story in the Bible? Because God has something to say to us through it. We are sometimes like Samson. So is the Church. But God always uses us, even our defeats.
Amen.

Closing Song: *Stronger* -Sanctify

Memory Verse:

"Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." -1 Peter 5:8

Announcements: -David

-Wed. Game show

-Grow groups sign up

-Sun Grad Sunday, with meal

-My leave of absence!

Benediction: -David

Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored

by James L. Crenshaw (Professor of OT at Vanderbilt Divinity School.)
John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1978

Key Takeaways:

Liberal, literary study (enamored with the literary writing) with little application for preaching.

God is the true hero of the story 130

Samson is a motif of Israel itself: selfish, not following it's calling, yet redeemed by God 131

God's love transcends that of the human relationships, parental or conjugal 135

Samson saga refuses to offer simple solutions for complex problems in real life 150

It entertains and instructs. Teaches about God and folly of human squanderings. 151

"Those who found themselves in trying circumstances discovered renewed hope."

"God heeds the cry of those who recognize their own helplessness." "Remember me, O Lord!"

Translation of Judges 13-16 (The story of Samson) 7-14

Introduction 15

Samson as Solar Myth (name of Samson suggests "sun") 16

Samson, the Natural Man (a real human being) 17

The Samson Saga - neither Solar Myth or Legend, but "saga" 19

Cannot date the story 20

Deuteronomistic editor made Samson a judge 21

Aesthetic Criticism - author's approach - beauty and art of the saga as a literary piece

Does not have to actually have happened for the story to be powerful 22

Have to bridge 2 worlds: world of the author and ours. Saga meaning becomes relevant 23

Chapter 1: Literary and Stylistic Traditions 27

Deathbed utterances, paternal blessing: recorded memory and anticipated destiny of a person 28

"Let me die with the Philistines (Judges 16:30a) shows Samson intertwined w/Philistines 29

Prayers - Samson calls himself God's "servant" but doesn't behave that way 31

-3 prayers are all answered by God. God answers his prayers 34

Heroic Exploits: Some say 12, some 7. Author says 5. 38

1. Killing 30 Philistines

2. Caught 300 foxes

3. Kill 1,000 with jawbone of ass

4. Carried away bronze door of the city gate

5. Brought down house of the Philistines 39

Deuteronomistic author shapes the story to say certain things 40

Virtue prospers a nation and vice leads to oppression

Editor inserted explanations to help reader understand past customs: 14:4,10, 15:20, 16:31

6 Motifs: 1. Barren Wife (Sarah, Rachel, Hannah) 41

2. Hero Helpless before a Woman's Wiles (Jael, Esther, Judith) 43

3. Quest for a Deity's Name - signifies power over deity (Jacob, Moses) 44

4. Death Wish of a Hero (Elijah, Jonah, Tobit) 47

5. Loss of Charisma (Saul)

6. Terror ver Theophany - when God manifests Himself (Jacob, Moses, Isaiah)
 Stylistic Features: divine punishment, angels, puns, rhymes, repetition, hyperbole, etc. 50
 Context: The book of Judges 59
 Added later to list of 12 judges, but more @ Samson's personal revenge against Philistines
 Nation that forgets God suffers oppression; only receives divine delivery w/repentance 60
 Original oral story is only one story (not 2) 64
 "In short, I view the saga as legendary and of uncertain date. In my view, it's purpose is two-fold:
 to provide entertainment and to offer negative example. The story entertains and teaches."

Chapter Two: Passion or Charisma? 65

Unifying Themes

Primary message Samson story teaches: Examine competing loyalties! 1. Filial devotion and erotic attachment, and 2. Negative example of broken vow and its consequences.
 Devotion to family (Hebrew value) vs romantic interest (Philistine) 66
 "Too late, Samson learns that whoever warms himself by the enemy fire gets burnt...." 71
 Samson Story Has 4 Episodes, and Each Has a Women to Symbolize Relationships
 1. 13:1-25 Hebrew mother - Ideal Israelite Woman. Nameless! Yet is trustworthy. 73
 She commits Samson to Nazarite vow, but he does not honor it 74
 She wants him used by God, but Samson only wants personal interest and revenge
 2. 14:1-15:20 Marriage based on physical beauty - Samson's Philistine wife 77
 Danger in exogamy (marriage with foreign woman). Endogamy is God's way 78
 Solomon, Jezebel, etc. 80
 Samson threw off parental authority! for romance ("she is right in my eyes") 82
 3. 16:1-4 Physical Lust Outside of Marriage - Philistine Harlot 90
 "Samson saw a harlot at Gaza and went in to her, as was his custom"!!
 4. 16:5-30 Unreciprocated Love - Delilah 91
 Samson *loves* her, but she uses him for money. She is named, but his wife wasn't 92
 Samson innocently believed her questions were based on a love she had for him 94
 Samson's Nazirite vow now becomes important, although ignored before (?) 95
 Samson, the solar man, who wanted the desire of his eye, is blinded (irony) 96

Chapter Three: The Riddles 99

Samson is esteemed man: 1) lady's man, 2) strong, and 3) witty
 Riddles communicate on 2 levels, use double meanings, "turn" on ciphers & carry a twist/danger 100
 Samson's riddle: a wedding riddle, tries to trap the Philistines to think it is sex 114
 Philistine's riddle: shows they caught his trap but avoided it 117
 Samson's retort: sexual overtone 118

Chapter Four: The Tragic Dimension 121

Spirit of Yahweh seized Samson making him able to do heroic deeds
 Yet Samson only used it to seek revenge! 122
 Samson fought personally against those who happened to be Israel's oppressors 124
 Narrator shows Philistines are unfairly treated by Samson! 126
 Samson symbolizes the negative hero / anti-hero (don't be like this, even though God used him!)
 Samson's prophecies were to be a great man used by God, but he didn't honor it 127
 God used him anyway, even though Samson acted selfishly 128
 A broken vow: Samson failed to keep his vow, but honored it finally at his death 129

God is the true hero of the story: answers Samson's prayers & redeems his selfish plea at the end 130
Samson is a motif of Israel itself: selfish, not following it's calling, yet redeemed by God 131
God looks on her with compassion and through her punishes evil
Philistine god Dagon vs Yahweh - God wins 132
God blesses Samson, even though he murders, fornicates, but not his hair (???) 133
"Samson's God can be reached in times of distress, even after betrayal of the vow."
"Samson's behavior typifies that of all Israel." 134 Selfish gets him into trouble, then prays,
God bails him out. 135
"God is the real hero of the Samson saga. Judges come and go."
God's love transcends that of the human relationships, parental or conjugal 135
Interpretations of Samson: Some frame him as saint (Hebrews 11!), others a tragic negative hero 136
Milton interprets Samson 143-148

Afterward: The Secret Is Out 149

"The Samson saga demonstrates Israelite narrative art at its zenith."
Samson saga refuses to offer simple solutions for complex problems in real life 150
It entertains and instructs. Teaches about God and folly of human squanderings. 151
"Those who found themselves in trying circumstances discovered renewed hope."
"God heeds the cry of those who recognize their own helplessness." "Remember me, O Lord!"

Edge Article

“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 13:24-25

Easter is fading into memory, graduation is coming quickly, and we are making our summer plans. If Easter is so important, how do we not let it slip away amid the business of now or get lost in all of the planning for what’s coming next? How do we live as disciples of Jesus with Easter as our defining reality?

I’ve been reading a book on Sampson. I have to confess, I have never liked the story of Sampson. It’s a short story deep within the book of Judges of the Bible. It’s at a time in Israel’s history after they have left Egypt and settled into the Promised Land, but before they had kings. The people struggled to follow God faithfully, and so God raised up “judges” who led the people to stay close to God.

Now, a “judge” in the Old Testament is not what we think of judges today. Well, maybe a little bit. They did arbitrate disputes when they arose and tried to settle arguments. But most importantly, they were military heroes who led the Israelites to victory against foreign oppressors and who governed the people to follow God.

There was a repeating cycle: 1. As long as a judge ruled, there was peace in the land, both against oppressors and in faithfulness to God. 2. But, when the judge died, the people fell away from God and started worshipping other, local gods. 3. God stopped protecting the people and let other peoples attack and subjugate the Israelites. 4. The people repented and turned to God for help in their misery. 5. God hears their cry and raises up a judge. 6. The judge leads the people in driving out the foreign oppressors and calls the people back to worshipping the true God. 7. Back to number 1, the cycle starts over (there are 12 judges mentioned in the Bible, and, interestingly, one was a female—Deborah—who as a military hero was sort of an early Joan of Arc!).

Samson is a judge, but from my reading, only accidentally helps free the people from the oppression of the Philistines. He was not a godly man, and if you remember from the “Samson and Delilah” story, he followed his romantic desires more than God. Yet, amazingly, God used him, even with all of his problems.

And here is where I’m coming to for my May Sunday message mini-series (3 weeks). I’m forcing myself to preach on Samson (I’ve scheduled this series purposefully so that I will dive deeply into all of God’s Word, and not just stick to the parts I like or understand better). I’m still not sure what all God is going to have me say, but what I am seeing right now is that God is active and working through people even when they struggle to stay close to God.

That’s a message of Easter, after all, isn’t it? Easter doesn’t fix our every flaw or make us perfect disciples. We still struggle to follow Jesus. And stories like Samson remind us—encourage us—that God uses us even when we are not tracking with Him very well. God still accomplishes His will, still fights for His people, still redeems the lost, and in the process, we also find transformation.

Living as Easter people means going through the cycle of the judges in our own hearts, with the good news of God’s assurance that He does not tire of our straying to the point of giving up on us. We all have Samson in us! We don’t always live the Easter promise well, but the risen Jesus keeps coming to us, working through us, and bringing us back.

Happy Easter, Samson!

Pastor David

6/2 Graduation - Batan

6/9 Dan Hair

6/16 Andrew

6/23 Peter Milloy

6/30 Steve R?

7/7 Andrew

7/14 Steve R?

7/21 Teen Challenge

7/28 Andrew

8/4 Dan Hair

8/11 Andrew

8/18 Andrew

8/25 Dan Hair

9/2 Andrew

9/9 David - Fall series begins

Best commercials??