

Sun., May 19:

Message: Samson 2: “The Lord’s Spirit began to move...” The Anti-Hero

Scripture: Judges 14-15, Various

Text: “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” -Hebrews 11:32-34

Memory Verse: [From Echo] -Andrew

Children’s Lesson: Rhymes -David

Blurb: We might remember Samson as the strong man of the Bible who did many amazing feats of strength. Yet we may not always remember just how badly he failed at following God’s calling on his life. God blessed him with special gifts, but he often used them for selfish reasons. What does God do with people like that? What does God do with people *like us* who are like that? This Sunday we’ll hear how God used Samson—failings and all—and how this is also true for how God still uses us!

Call to Worship: Hymn Sing

Welcome: -Pastor David

Introduction

Love.Grow.Serve.

Riddles! Ancient form of fun. Samson story has a number of riddles in it.

Riddles are clever, and require you to think about something differently.

Classic: What is black and white and read all over? Newspaper. Red/Read

So, we’ll try some riddles we made up about the Samson story. Hopefully it’ll be fun and help us learn more about the story.

Let’s ask some kids. I’ll come ask you a riddle about the Samson story. Let’s see if you can figure it out. Remember, the Samson story is the hint.

Riddles 1: (Grade-school kids)

1. I grow with no bones

No pain do I dread

A style of my own

Decoration for the head. (Answer: Hair)

2. What gets built as it is torn? (Muscles)

3. I begin and end the city’s wall.

I keep people out, I keep people in.

I’m stronger than a whole army,

Yet one person carries me away. (City gates)

All right, we’ll come back to some others a bit later.

Memory Verse:

Worship Music: - Sanctify

That's Why We Praise Him

Stronger

Your Love Defends Me

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Offering: *Give Thanks* - Sanctify

Riddles 2: (Young kids)

4. I am a king, but not of people
I'm scary, and yet I purr.
I can eat you,
But when you hold me in your hand,
you can eat me! (Lion)
5. Poke your fingers in my eyes
And I open up my jaws
Though I have no teeth
I can bit most everything (Scissors)
6. Ten Men's Strength,
Ten Men's Length,
Ten Men can't break me,
Yet a small boy carries me. (A rope)

Apostle's Creed

Prayers: - Pastor Andrew

Riddles 3:

7. Subtle hints require an answer
Only the clever will play
Try to think outside the box
We could be here all day (A riddle)
8. We are sly and crafty
And covered in fur
If you tie our tails together
You might feel the burn (Foxes)
9. Never goes bad, but does go hard.
Sad on fingers, but happy on tongues
Made by many, enjoyed by few
Those who find it discover gold (Honey)

Message: Samson: "The Lord's Spirit Began to Move." The Anti-Hero. -Pastor David

PP#1: Samson: “The Lord’s Spirit Began to Move.” The Anti-Hero.

“And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” -Hebrews 11:32-34

Samson: “The Lord’s Spirit Began to Move.” The Anti-Hero. Hebrews 11:32-34, “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”

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

I told you last week that I’m not too overly keen on this message series. I’ve never liked the biblical story of Samson, so I’ve avoided preaching it. But I also believe that all of Scripture is inspired and given by God for our edification and spiritual growth, and so I decided last fall to add it to the preaching cycle, putting it right before my renewal leave this summer. After trying to preach this, I knew I was going to need a break!

You see, although Samson is a famous figure in the Bible, famous for being the strongest person who ever lived, there is really not much more beyond that worth saying about him!

And last week, I got a little break because the first chapter of the Samson story is about his mother, who is worth talking about. But now today I have to deal with Samson himself. And as I read and reread this story this week, I again wondered why this story is in the Bible.

Well, let’s take a look at it. Maybe the Holy Spirit will show us something. Now, I wrote this part on Wednesday: “Usually when I prepare my messages, I have the application and main points in mind before I begin. But, this time, I admit that I don’t. So, I’m on the same journey as you are!”

We turn to the Old Testament book of Judges. It’s about the time in Israel’s history after Moses led them out of Egypt, after Joshua led them into the Promised Land, and before they formed a kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon. During these 300 years, the Philistines were their main enemy, and whenever the Israelites turned away from God, God let the Philistines overtake them.

And in Judges, chapter 13, that’s how the story of Samson begins. The people had turned their back on God and so God stopped protecting them. He let the Philistines overrun them and occupy them. But God does come to their rescue. He tells a woman that her miracle baby would be the next judge, the military leader who would push back the Philistines.

PP#3: Judges 13:24-25 (CEB)

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.

This special deliverer was to be dedicated to God, and he was to live his whole life as a nazirite. That meant 1. No eating grapes or grape products, including alcohol. 2. No touching anything unclean, like dead bodies. And 3. Never cutting his hair.

And the end of chapter 13, we see things start off well. As a boy and teenager, thanks to his upbringing, he seems to know and follow God. As a young adult, I don't know, at the age of 20 or so I would guess, it seems that he felt God's calling to the special work God had for him.

Now, you might remember that eventually, Samson gets captured and is blinded. So, even as we start the story, I want you to *watch* (!) for the recurring references to eyes and sight.

PP#4: Judges 14 (CEB)

14:1 Samson traveled down to Timnah. While he was in Timnah, a Philistine woman caught his eye. 2 He went back home and told his father and mother, "A Philistine woman in Timnah caught my eye; now get her for me as a wife!"

3 But his father and mother replied to him, "Is there no woman among your own relatives or among all our people that you have to go get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"

Judges 14, starting with verse one. Remember, the Lord was stirring Samson. So, "Samson traveled down to Timnah." Timnah was a Philistine-occupied town. It seems God had pushed him there to start his confrontation with their Philistine occupiers. But look what happens to Samson: what does he *see*? Does he *see* the enemy God wants him to confront? Well, "While he was in Timnah, a Philistine woman *caught his eye*. He went back home and told his father and mother, "A Philistine woman in Timnah *caught my eye*; now get her for me as a wife!"

Did he see what God sent them there to see? No! He sees a woman! And this begins Samson's ongoing struggle with women. There are four women in his life. The first is his mother, against whom the other three are compared. She is holy and god-fearing. The other three are all trouble. He leaves his mother's oversight, and he immediately starts losing his focus. God pushes him to Timnah, but he places his eye on the wrong object! Samson sees what he wants, not what God wants him to see. And this is the reoccurring plot of Samson's story.

His parents protest, trying to steer him back on track. Don't marry one of the enemy! Choose a wife from your own people. The Scriptures handed down from Moses say you should! Verse 3, "But his father and mother replied to him, 'Is there no woman among your own relatives or among all our people that you have to go get a wife from the *uncircumcised* Philistines?'" They use the word "uncircumcised" to remind Samson of the Scripture's prohibition.

PP#5: Judges 14 (CEB)

3b Yet Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, because she's the one I want!" [*literally*, "she is right in my eyes."] 4 His father and mother didn't know that the Lord was behind this. He was looking for an opening with the Philistines, because they were ruling over Israel at that time.

We keep going in verse 3, "Yet Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, because she's the one I want!' [*literally*, "she is right in my eyes."]

Over and over again in the book of Judges, it says that the people turned away from God and did what was right *in their own eyes*. Now, Samson says it himself! "I don't care if it's forbidden, or against God's wishes, she's the one I want!" And there is a play on words here, for Samson's eyes mean his own wants, but it also means that all Samson cares about is that she is beautiful! He sees only the surface. We'll see that over and over again, too. Samson, although very smart and clever, how shall I put this, usually does not think with his brain!

Now the compiler of the story inserts a note. It's verse 4. "His father and mother didn't know that the Lord was behind this. [That is, Samson seeking a Philistine wife.] He was *looking* [God's

eyes!] for an opening with the Philistines, because they were ruling over Israel at that time.” Now, this doesn’t mean that God was telling Samson to take a foreign wife. This is the ancient Hebrew way of saying that God is still in control and that He was going to use Samson’s selfish choice and turn it into an opportunity for having Samson accomplish God’s plan anyway. It doesn’t derail God’s plan. It just now plays out a bit differently.

PP#6: *Image of Samson killing the lion*

Well, who is going to tell Samson “No!” when he is now an adult and everyone can see his strength? So, he drags his parents down there to set up the marriage. When they come to the vineyards in Timnah, a lion attacks them. It says, “The Lord’s spirit rushed over him” (vs. 6), and he easily tore the lion apart with his bare hands. But notice, the Lord’s spirit rushed over him to give him special super-human strength. Samson was strong, yes, but at times, God’s spirit came upon him to make his strength a superpower.

PP#7: *Image of Samson finding honey in the lion*

Next time they go down there again, Samson goes to look at the lion’s carcass. Now, remember his nazirite vow to not touch anything unclean, like a dead animal? Well, Samson *sees* some delicious honey that bees had made inside the lion’s skeleton. He eats some, breaking his vow.

PP#8: *Image of Samson telling the riddle at his wedding feast.*

Samson throws a lavish feast for his wedding, lasting seven days! The Philistine leaders select 30 young men to be with him, to honor the wedding. At the feast, Samson proposes a challenge. This is the riddle part of the story. He will give them a riddle, and if they can solve it, he will give them each a linen robe and a set of clothes. Samson is strong, but he is also showing off his clever intellect. He knows he’s got them, because he can use the honey and lion as a riddle and fool them into thinking something else. It’s a wedding feast, and it was customary to tell clever riddles and stories that insinuated the consummation of the wedding night.

PP#9: Judges 14 (CEB)

14 He said to them,

“Out of the eater there came something to eat.

Out of the strong there came something sweet.”

So, Samson proposes the riddle. Verse 14, “Out of the eater there came something to eat. Out of the strong there came something sweet.” Cool, it even rhymes in English!

Now, the Philistines detect there is a trap here, and they are careful enough not to fall into Samson’s snare of answering it in the obvious sexual overtones they see. But they can’t figure out how it could be answered any other way. So, after three days, they go to his wife and threaten to burn her and her household if she doesn’t pry the riddle’s answer out of Samson for them. Nice neighbors!

Now, she doesn’t go to Samson for help with this threat. Instead, she sides with the Philistines against him. At least that’s how Samson sees it...we’ll see that in a minute. But she cries on his shoulder saying, “You don’t love me! If you did, you would tell me the riddle’s answer!” She carries on for the remaining four days of the feast. Finally, she wears him down...and I can’t help but

wonder if her keeping a romantic “distance” also helped...and he finally tells her. She tells the 30 Philistines, who then, in mockery, answer Samson’s riddle in the form of another riddle.

Samson’s anger flared. The Bible again puts it this way, “Then the Lord’s spirit rushed over him,” and in a fit, rushes off, kills 30 Philistine men, takes their clothing and gives it to the horrified men at the wedding feast. Did God’s spirit push Samson to commit 30 murders? No. It was God’s spirit that gave Samson his strength, but he used it wrongly and selfishly. What was given for good he used for ill.

Then, he leaves in a huff without his wife and goes back to his home town. His wife’s father, thinking he had left for good, eventually marries her off to one of the 30 companions at the wedding feast: you know, one of those who threatened to burn them all earlier!

PP#10: *Image of Samson and the foxes*

Now we begin chapter 15. Samson cools off and eventually goes back down to make up with his wife. But he finds that she’s been married off to someone else. Her father offers her younger sister as a bride instead, but Samson won’t have it. His anger flares again, and he says ominously in verse 3, “No one can blame me now for being ready to bring down trouble on the Philistines!”

Motive is wrong, but the outcome is what God had wanted. Uproot the Philistines.

So, what does Samson do? He catches 300 foxes, and ties to foxes together by the tail, also tying in a burning torch, and releases them in the fields. The harvest is burned! When the Philistines learn that Samson did it, they go and burn Samson’s wife, new husband, and father-in-law to death.

Wow, anger and revenge! Back and forth!

Samson responded by declaring he will get revenge for their revenge! He attacked them and singlehandedly inflicted great blows upon them.

We’re at verse 9 now. It continues to escalate! The Philistines call up their army and attack the Israelites in Judah. They explain that they want to do to Samson what he did to them.

Terrified, the people of Judah go talk to Samson. He tells them, “I’m just doing to them what they did to me.” Revenge upon revenge! Escalation! So, the Judeans ask if they can turn Samson over to the Philistines to avoid war. He agrees, and they tie him with two new ropes, very strong!

PP#11: Judges 15 (CEB)

14 When Samson arrived at Lehi, the Philistines met him and came out shouting. The Lord’s spirit rushed over him, the ropes on his arms became like burned-up linen, and the ties melted right off his hands. 15 He found a donkey’s fresh jawbone, picked it up, and used it to kill one thousand men.

Chapter 15, verse 14, “When Samson arrived at Lehi, the Philistines met him and came out shouting. The Lord’s spirit rushed over him [there it is again, his special power from God], the ropes on his arms became like burned-up linen [brittle and fragile], and the ties melted right off his hands. He found a donkey’s fresh jawbone, picked it up, and used it to kill one thousand men.”

After he’s done with this ferocious battle, we see Samson pray. He seems he hasn’t forgotten about God in all his selfish anger and vengeance. But it’s not an overly noble prayer, really.

PP#12: Judges 15 (CEB)

18 Now Samson was very thirsty, so he called out to the Lord, “You are the one who allowed this great victory to be accomplished by your servant’s hands. Am I now going to

die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” 19 So God split open the hollow rock in Lehi, and water flowed out of it. When Samson drank, his energy returned and he was recharged. Thus that place is still called by the name [The Spring of Him Who Called] in Lehi today.

20 Samson led Israel for twenty years during the time of the Philistines.

Verse 18, “Now Samson was very thirsty, so he called out to the Lord, ‘You are the one who allowed this great victory to be accomplished by your servant’s hands.’ [So, it seems at least, Samson sees this battle as not just about vengeance, but about his calling to liberate the Israelites and throw off the oppressive power of the Philistines. But then Samson kind of throws a challenge back at God.] Am I now going to die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?’ [God, are you going to allow this? Hmmm. What a prayer! Even so, God answers it and helps him!] So God split open the hollow rock in Lehi, and water flowed out of it. When Samson drank, his energy returned and he was recharged. Thus that place is still called by the name [The Spring of Him Who Called] in Lehi today.” And then, there is this editorial summary verse, just like at the end of the next chapter. Verse 20, “Samson led Israel for twenty years during the time of the Philistines.”

Led Israel for 20 years? That’s a bit generous. He was active against the Philistines for 20 years, and his battles with them, as we’ll find out next week, did gut their power and influence over the Israelites. The compiler of the stories of the judges treats Samson like the others, but I struggle to see how he really acted anything like the other judges, who fought in God’s name.

Samson, you see, fought in *his* name. He fought because of anger, because of revenge, because of his selfishness. He became just like the Philistines he was called to defeat. How tragic! He had so many special blessings from God, but his eye saw what *he* wanted, and he let that lead him astray.

I guess the outcome of his actions did put the Philistines on the run, and in that way God’s purposes were fulfilled. But Samson himself is not one we can offer as a godly example or guide. He may have been renowned for his strength, but certainly not his faith! He’s an example, all right, of what NOT to do!

Samson, the Bible’s anti-hero! Why is he in the Bible again? Because he *accidentally* fulfilled God’s plan?

PP#13: Samson: The Anti-Hero

“The Lord’s Spirit began to move...”

Wait a minute. You know, maybe that’s the point here after all. The Bible always reveals God’s plan accomplished. Sometimes it’s because of God’s people, and sometimes it’s *in spite of* God’s people. The Bible doesn’t only tell the good, the pretty, and the right. It also tells the bad, the ugly, and the dirty. Because—ooh, this is good!—it’s not actually about *the people*! It’s always about God! And we can get tripped up when we focus too much on what the holy people did right. It can become about good people doing good things. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, they offer such awesome testimonies of following God. But that’s not the Gospel, is it? You see, we begin to realize that we don’t compare so well with these giants in faith. When we are honest, our faith seems so much weaker. We struggle to keep up with God. If I have to be like Daniel, I’m not doing very well!

But then, there’s Samson. God gives him great powers and calls him to great things, and over and over again, he screws it up. Just wait until next week...there’s more! And even though he screws up so mightily, his story shows that God still managed to accomplish what God wanted.

PP#14: Samson: The Anti-Hero

“The Lord’s Spirit began to move...”

It’s not about Samson (or you!): It’s about God!

We talked about what Samson saw. I see myself more in Samson than I do in Daniel. I see what I want, and I tend to put my focus on that, too. I falter on God’s plan for my life, and then I wonder what good I can be to God. But the Samson story tells me, it’s not about Samson, or Daniel. It’s not about me. It’s about God, who is faithful, who never falters, who always finds a way to accomplish His plan.

This is such good news! Samson helps us to not put our faith in the mighty people of old, or in our own strength or accomplishments, but in God, who does pull it out, every time! If God used Samson, He can use me!

Samson, we learn, was burdened by the avalanche of consequences of his actions. That urges us to try to change and to follow God more closely. We do want the outcomes of Daniel, and not Samson, in our lives. So, although God will use us no matter what we do, we are motivated to work hard on being a more faithful disciple of Jesus.

Hebrews 11 lists Samson among the renowned men of long ago. And it says, they were mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight. That was Samson, I guess. But this list is not the people who got it right. It says, through faith “they were made strong out of weakness.” (Hebrews 11:34)

PP#15: Samson: The Anti-Hero

“The Lord’s Spirit began to move...”

It’s not about Samson (or you!): It’s about God!

They “...were made strong out of weakness...” (Hebrews 11:34)

Wow! Samson, the strongest man who ever lived, was too weak to divert his eyes. But in his weakness, as we shall see most clearly next week, God made him strong. Do you see it? They’re not the ones who get it right...they’re the ones who got God! They are witnesses to the greatness of God, and what God can do in any life, in any situation! And the good news is, we can get God, too!

You know, I don’t hate Samson quite so much any more. Yes, I still think he’s a fool, especially in the whole Delilah story. But he stands *strong* in the Bible’s story as a testimony that God can use you, no matter how much you screw up. Don’t be like Samson! But when you find yourself a bit too much like Samson, hear the Good News that God will redeem you, too!

PP#16: Samson Riddles:

10. A braying bludgeon.

11. A promise for life
Hard to maintain
Set apart
For God’s great name

12. Descended from giants
Marauding men
Power and war
Dagon will send

Okay, a couple more riddles to end with. These are hard ones, from Andrew! Let’s see who can get them.

[Go through riddles #10-12]

Okay, one last riddle.

PP#17: Samson Riddle:

13. We mess up, we stumble
We turn selfishly
Yet somehow we notice
Good things come to be.

The answer, to this riddle? Samson can tell you: it's God, working in us, working in spite of us! God is faithful and God is gracious. He will ensure His plan will come together, and somehow, He'll even use us, even when we mess up. That's why Samson is in the Bible!

Amen!

Andrew?

Closing Song: *Lead on O King Eternal* -Sanctify

Memory Verse:

Announcements: -David

Benediction: -David