

The Secret to Samson's Strength

Judges 16:15-21

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021

Confirmation Sunday

Graduation Sunday

Old Testament Lesson, Judges 16:4-21

⁴ Some time later, [Samson] fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. ⁵ The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

⁷ Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man."

⁸ Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh thongs that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. ⁹ With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered.

¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied."

¹¹ He said, "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man."

¹² So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

¹³ Delilah then said to Samson, "Until now, you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied."

He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric [the loom] and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric ¹⁴ and tightened it with the pin.

Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." ¹⁶ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.

¹⁷ So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. ¹⁹ Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.

²⁰ Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!"

He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.²¹ Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison.

Sermon, "The Secret to Samson's Strength" by Pastor Dave

With its sexual innuendo, scheming and intrigue, the story of Samson and Delilah is one of the most familiar stories in all the Old Testament. It is such a familiar story that throughout the ages the name *Samson* has been associated with strength and the name *Delilah* has been associated with seductive behavior and deceit.

Samson began his long, hairy affair with Delilah in verse 4 where scriptures tell us that Samson fell in love with the woman. However, scriptures do not tell us that Delilah fell in love with Samson. We assume she did not, although she may have been attracted to his strength or perhaps even his "bad boy" reputation.

It wasn't long until the Philistines—Israel's arch enemy at the time—approached Delilah and bribed her into becoming their accomplice. They wanted to discover the source of Samson's strength so they might "overpower him, tie him up and subdue him" (vs. 5).

That suggests to me that there was nothing about Samson's appearance that suggested that he was a muscleman. If he were a man of 325 lbs. of solid muscle who could bench press 800 lbs., no one would ask, "What is the source of your strength?" It would've been obvious.

I suspect that Samson did not have six-pack abs and that he did not work out in the weight room at the local YMCA every day. In fact, when I read the full story of Samson, I envision a guy who was most concerned with the pleasures of this world so that means he probably had a nice paunch going for him.

There was something about Samson that made people ask, "What's the source of your strength?"

That's the critical question in the passage we've just read from Judges 16. The Philistines wanted to know the source of Samson's strength. Delilah wanted to know the source of Samson's strength. Indeed, she wanted to know that secret so badly that she literally nagged Samson to death. Finally, in his exasperation, Samson revealed the source of his strength. And it was...?

His hair?

Wrong. However, even Samson believed that his hair was the source of his strength. But even Samson was wrong. But, like all good deceptions there was a grain of truth to what Samson believed.

To discover the real source of Samson's strength, we have to go back to Judges 13 where a man named Manoah had a wife who was unable to bear children. We don't even know the woman's name. We do know, however, that one day the angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "Although you are barren now, you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. The boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. And he shall deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

According to Numbers 6 that meant that Samson was never to drink wine or even eat grapes or raisins—all products of the vine. He was never to touch a corpse and he was never to cut his hair.

In Israel, many people took the Nazirite vow for a short time—a few days, weeks, months or even years. But a few people were Nazirites from birth, as was Samson. In other words, he was not a Nazirite by choice; he was a Nazirite because that's the way his mama raised him.

The same holds true for many of us; we became Christians not by our own choice, but because that's the way our mommies (or our daddies) raised us. They even baptized us before we had a say in the matter.

However, there comes a time in our life when we have to decide for ourselves if the decision our parents made for us when we were infants is going to be our own decision. In other words, our parents decided we should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; now will we as young adults confirm that their decision was the right decision?

What did Samson do? How did he respond to the vow his mother made for him when he was still in his mother's womb?

Remember there were three parts to Samson's vow: to touch no carcass, to drink no wine and to cut no hair.

In Judges 14 there's a long story concerning Samson's earlier love life with a Philistine woman. Interwoven with the story is a subplot in which Samson kills a lion with his bare hands. Some time later, Samson encounters the lion's carcass and sees in it a swarm of bees with some honey. He scoops out the honey with his hands and eats it.

Samson marries the Philistine woman and at the reception spins an elaborate riddle based on his encounter with the lion and his subsequent meal of honey from the carcass of the lion. Samson had the Philistines lay a wager on solving the riddle.

When the Philistines failed to solve the riddle and then failed to pay their end of the wager, Samson punished them cruelly. But neither the punishment nor the riddle itself is what's really important to the story.

What's important is that Samson touched the carcass of the lion; he even went so far as to eat honey from the lion. In other words, Samson broke the first of three braids which comprised his Nazirite vow.

Buried within that same story is an important detail of Samson going into the vineyards and, later, participating in drinking feasts with the Philistines. By so doing, Samson broke the second of three braids which comprised his Nazirite vow. All that was left was for Samson to cut his hair and his Nazirite vows would be completely broken.

What was the secret behind Samson's strength? Was it his hair? No

Why do people make vows in the first place? Some people refuse to make vows because they're afraid that vows are made to be broken and since they don't want to break their vows, they don't make them. Couples who are afraid they might get divorced decide to live together without the benefit of marriage. All they're doing is setting themselves up for failure.

Why should we make vows? Because vows make you strong. The couple that I just mentioned would make their relationship stronger if they exchanged wedding vows with one another.

So what was the source of Samson's strength? Was it his hair? No. It was his vow to live a life dedicated to God. And when he cut his hair, he broke the last braid of his Nazirite vow.

If you want to be strong, then make good vows...and keep your vows. Your vows are one of the means by which you stay connected to Jesus Christ.

As you read the rest of the story, Samson is blinded and enslaved. As a prisoner of the Philistines, Samson is brought to a banquet so the Philistines could mock him. But something has happened to Samson: his hair began to grow out. But remember, that's not the source of his strength.

But something else is growing in Samson: **faith**. And Samson does something that when he didn't do much when he was free and a judge over Israel: Samson prayed. He asked God to remember him and give him strength. And God answered his prayer and Samson literally brought the house down. It wasn't his hair; it was his faith in God gave him strength.

If you keep your vows to God, you will be strong. I don't mean that you'll be a strong Christian; I mean that you'll be a strong human being. And you'll be strong where it matters the most—on the inside. You will have strong, moral character rooted in God's love for you and in your love for God.