

Sermon for Sunday, July 18, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"WHEN DELILAH IS YOUR BARBER"

Judges 16:6-21

Text: "...And he did not know that the Lord had left him." --Judges 16:20

The intriguing little story of Samson is preserved for us in the book of Judges in the Old Testament. Let me give you the historical setting in the national life of the Jews during which the period of the judges occurred. After Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Then, under the leadership of Joshua, they entered the promised land--Palestine--and occupied it with the area being divided up among the twelve tribes. One of these tribes was the tribe of Dan and Samson came from that tribe. After the death of Joshua and until the time when Saul was made the first King of the Jews several hundred years were to go by. During those years the Jews had no king. They were a theocracy--a nation ruled directly by God.

It is this period that is known as the time of the judges. When the Jews needed a leader or when trouble arose or when enemies attacked, God would put his Spirit upon some individual. This charismatic figure would become the leader of his people during the time of need and he would be known as a judge. The names of many of these people who were judges are familiar to you--names such as Deborah, Gideon, Barak, and, of course, Samson.

Now, I am going to assume that you good Christians are Bible reading scholars and know the story of Samson. That being the case, you will remember that he is first of all a child of prayer. His mother was at first unable to have children. In those days it was considered a disgrace for a woman to be unable to bear children--especially male children--and her barrenness was a burden upon her heart. So, she went to the temple and there she placed her burden at the feet of God as she prayed. The Bible tells us that as she prayed an angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore, beware, and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for lo, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazarite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

Now, what is a Nazarite? Well, a Nazarite was a person who belonged to a religious order within Judaism. He took certain vows. He drank no wine or strong drink, there were certain foods he did not eat. He did not cut his hair and he made vows to God as to the kind of life he would lead and the kind of person he would be. So Samson was to be a Nazarite. There was to be another Nazarite in centuries to come with whom you are more familiar. He came drinking no strong drink, he ate locust and wild honey, he dressed himself in the skins of animals. He preached a message of repentance--and his name was John the Baptist.

But this leads us to the first point I want to make about Samson which has to do with the secret of his power. He is famous for his strength. Once he killed a lion with bare hands. Another time he picked up the gate of a Philistine city and simply walked off with it. On another occasion he killed a thousand Philistines and his only weapon was the jawbone of an ass. If I asked you to tell me the source of Samson's strength, what would you say? Well, probably you would say that his hair was the source of his great power. After all, it was the cutting of his hair that stripped him of his strength and led to his capture.

But if you said his hair was the source of his power you would be wrong. The source of his power was the Spirit of God resting upon him. His hair only represented his relationship to God. He was a Nazarite. He had taken certain vows, including one that he would not cut his hair. But Samson permitted circumstances to occur in which his hair was cut. You see, what really happened is he broke his vows, he shattered his covenant with God. When he did that, the Bible says that the Lord left him. Samson walked right into Delilah's barber shop and he came out without God.

It is precisely at this point that you and I can learn an important lesson from Samson. The power to live a Christian life grows out of our inner relationship to God. Our spiritual power is a result of inviting Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives. If we violate this relationship--if we repudiate that invitation to Jesus--we strip ourselves of our spiritual power. Samson's hair represented his dynamic relationship to God. The source of his power grew out of an interlocking of his heart to God's. In the deepest sense of the word this must be true of us. When we have the spirit of God in our hearts we can be spiritual giants--we can be strong in the Lord and the power of his might. That's the secret of spiritual power.

But note secondly not only the secret of Samson's power but the source of his failure. Now, the immediate cause of Samson's downfall was a woman. Three times she asked him the secret of his power and three times he gave her the wrong answer. You would think that after three efforts to betray him that Samson would have realized what was going on. One begins to wonder about Samson's intelligence! Yet, strangely enough, the fourth time Samson tells Delilah his secret and it leads to his downfall, his capture, and his blindness, for the Bible tells us they put out his eyes.

Why do you suppose Samson told her his secret? Do you think it was because he thought it could never happen to him? Perhaps you have seen someone caught up in the turmoil and the trauma of sin and you think, "Well, I would never let that happen to me." Or you think, "Boy, I'd never do a thing like that." Perhaps that's what Samson thought--that it could never happen to him--and he forgot that his power was a gift from God. Don't we do that? Aren't we guilty of often forgetting that our spiritual strength lies in God? When Samuel became involved in sin, he broke his covenant with God. Having become involved in sin, the Bible says, "He did not know that the Lord had left him."

We forget that, too. We get involved in sin, thinking it can never happen to us, thinking we are spiritually strong, thinking that we can handle sin in whatever form it comes. And then suddenly we awake to the tragic realization that we've gone through Delilah's barber shop and come out with a spiritual crew cut. We find ourselves spiritually impoverished, our spiritual power broken. We discover that we have done things for which we are so ashamed and sorry--that we aren't the kind of persons we wanted to be or meant to be at all.

Don't underestimate the power of sin in your life and don't overestimate your own spiritual ability. There will come that unexpected slip of the tongue, that unexpected temptation, that unexpected desire that will catch you in a weak moment, and if you do not have a strong relationship to Jesus like Samson you will find yourself overwhelmed. There is a tragic picture etched in my heart of a young wife who had committed adultery. She had gotten caught up in a whirlpool of temptation and in a moment of weakness she failed. She had turned to God and surely he forgave her. Her husband with his heart made big by the grace of God had forgiven her. There was one problem--she could not forgive herself.

This brings me to the third point I want to make about Samson--it is the source of scars of sin, the scars that sin leaves. The scars of Samson's sin would always remain. As long as he lived, his blind eyes could never again see the light of day. That's what sin did to Samson.

I don't think we ought to kid ourselves about sin. God is a loving and forgiving God, but the scars of sin remain. Sin always takes its toll. It demands its pound of flesh. It always leaves its scars. That young wife, forgiven of God, forgiven by her husband, cried out in the inner agony of a dreadful scar because she could not forgive herself. We simply cannot sin with impunity and hope to escape. Sin leaves its scarred destruction in the form of broken character, broken spirits, broken hearts, broken homes, broken lives, broken emotional beings. Samson laughed at the thought of what the Philistines could do to him--laughed until he awoke in a prison bound in chains, laughed until they gouged his eyes out, laughed until they bound him with brass chains to the grinding wheel and then the laughter died on his lips in an anguished cry of torment and tragedy. So it is with sin. It always takes its toll and leaves its bitter scar. If you are not living as you know God wants you to live today, if you are not the kind of a person that you know God wants you to be, do not make Samson's mistake of thinking that you can get by, because sin will leave its ugly scar--it always has and it always will.

Then, in the fourth place, I want you to notice the sadness of waste. Samson was a child of prayer. He was intended to be a charismatic leader of Israel to free them from the Philistines, to deliver them from bondage and slavery, but at the end when his people came and took up his broken and mutilated body from the ruins of the temple where he had pulled the pillars down and the roof had caved in and he had indeed killed some of his enemies, but in the process he himself was lost. When they came and took up his body, he had not accomplished the purposes for which God had created him. That was the sadness of waste. The world has never seen a man quite like Samson--a man of great piety, great physical strength, intelligence, a great leader, yet a man who sin destroyed. What a sad waste it was.

I want to say to you this morning, whoever you are, God has a purpose and a plan for your life. At the moment of your conception the possible combination of genes was almost infinite, and yet you were created just as you are. Why are you here? Why are you who you are? Are you nothing more than the chance combinations of certain genes? Is your life and who you are nothing more than an accident? No, life has meaning and purpose because God chose to create each one of us just as we are and for each of you he has a plan for your life, a purpose for which he created you. I want to ask you today, "What is God's plan for your life?" You see, when God created Samson the Bible tells us he had a plan in mind, a job for Samson to do. The angel said he shall begin to free his people from the Philistines. But when they took his broken body home, the job was still undone. Is there such a sadness of waste in your life this morning? Are you sensitive to the leading of God or are you wasting your life, wasting your time, wasting your talents when God has a plan for you?

Finally, I would say this to you. The Bible says that Samson's hair began to grow back (vs. 22). That is to say that having fallen victim to sin, Samson tried to get right with God. He tried to reestablish his relationship with God, and when the Bible talks about his hair growing back I think it simply means that his relationship to the Lord was being renewed. He had pushed God out of his heart but at that moment when he opened the door of his heart again God came right back in. God is like that. He always knocks at the door of our heart. So, by his repentance, Samson renewed his covenant and God's spirit came back into Samson's life.

I don't know what you have been doing. I don't know what sin you may have committed. I don't know what evil thing you may be involved in this morning, but you know. You know what's going on in your life, and I want to say to you if what's going on is not God's plan for your life, repent. All you have to do is what Samson did--turn again to the Lord and God will come right there into your heart and life. That's what God is life, and thank God for that. God wants to forgive you. He wants to heal you and he has a plan for your life. Will you find God's plan for you today?

leaves its scarred destruction in the form of broken character, broken spirit, broken heart, broken home, broken lives; broken emotional, broken physical, broken spiritual. It is the thought of what the Philistines could do to him--laughed until he wept in a prison bound in chains, laughed until they gouged his eyes out, laughed until they poured him with brass chains to the grinding wheel and when the laughter died, his lips in an anguished cry of repentance and tragedy. So is it with you. If you are not living as you know God, takes the toll and leaves its bitter scar. If you are not living as you know God, wants you to live today. If you are not the kind of a person that you know God wants you to be, do not make Samson's mistake of thinking that you can get by, because sin will leave its only scar--it always has and it always will.

Then, in the fourth place, I want you to notice the sadness of what Samson's life was. He was intended to be a charismatic leader of Israel to lead them from the Philistines, to deliver them from bondage and slavery, but at the end of his life, his people came and took up his broken and mutilated body from the ruins of the temple where he had killed the Philistines down and the roof had fallen in and he had trampled under his feet the bones of his people. In the process he himself was lost. When they came and took up his body, he had not accomplished his purpose for which God had created him. That was the sadness of what. The world had never seen a man put in Samson--a man of great piety, great physical strength, intelligence, a great leader, yet a man who also destroyed. That's sad and waste it was.

I want to say to you this morning, whenever you are, God has a purpose and a plan for your life. At the moment of your conception the possible completion of your life was almost infinite, and yet you were created just as you are. Why are you here? Are you nothing more than the chance combination of atoms? Is your life and what you are nothing more than an accident? No, life has meaning and purpose because God chose to create each one of us just as we are and for each of you he has a plan for your life. A purpose for which he created you. I want to ask you today, "What is God's plan for your life?" For each of you God created Samson the Bible tells us he had a plan to deliver Israel from the Philistines. The angel said he shall begin to free his people from the Philistines. But when they took his broken body home, the joy was still wanting. Is there such a sadness of waste in your life this morning? Are you searching for the meaning of life or are you wasting your life, wasting your time, wasting your talents when God has a plan for you?

Finally, I would say this to you. The Bible says that Samson's hair began to grow back (vs. 13). That is to say that having fallen victim to sin, Samson tried to get right with God. He tried to reestablish his relationship with God. But when the Bible talks about his hair growing back I think it simply means that his relationship to the Lord was being renewed. He had begun again God came to him for at that moment when he opened the door of his heart again God came to him. God is like that. He always knocks at the door of your heart. So, if you repent, Samson renewed his covenant and God's spirit came back into Samson's life.