

Coach House Church BEACONS

IN GODS STRENGTH

21ST JULY 2020

As the current lock-down has eased, certain activities that had been banned for a while have now resumed. One such recent activity that became available again was getting your hair cut. At the stroke of midnight barber shops and hairdressers were open for business, serving needy customers who had been missing their expert attention for far too long. This reminded me of story in the bible about a haircut, but in this story the person getting his hair cut really shouldn't have done because it led to some unpleasant consequences. We are, of course, talking about Samson. Now Samson is often remembered for being very strong, and also for his ill fated relationship with a woman named Delilah, but how did this all come about and what can we learn from his story.

In the book of Hebrews, which was a letter written to Jewish Christians around 60 AD, there is a list of great heroes from the old testament who, by faith, did something special to serve God. Samson is mentioned in this list. There is no specific detail of Samson's exploits here but the writer says of these people that "through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised" This endorsement of Samson's life doesn't mean that he was in any way perfect, in fact, far from it as we will see, but it does mean that at a critical point in his life he relied totally and utterly on God, and it is this faith that he is being commended for.

So lets take a look at the story of Samson.

Samson was the son of an ordinary man, Manoah, but he was born in extraordinary circumstances. His wife was barren but one day an angel appeared to her to announce that she would have a son. He gave some instructions as to how Samson was to live; Samson was never to drink alcohol, or eat anything unclean,

nor was he ever to have his hair cut. The angel also said "He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines"

Well the story continues with Samson not really living as he should have done. What we see in his life is impulsiveness, lust, revenge and foolish practical jokes. Firstly Samson sees a Philistine girl who must have been physically very attractive. He tells his father that he wants to marry this girl. Samson should have known that it was wrong for him to want to marry Philistine and Manoah certainly knew this. Manoah tried to dissuade Samson but he was having none of it so they arranged the marriage. Now at the time weddings traditionally took around a week to complete and Samson took the opportunity to tease some of his brides friends. This lead to some nastiness, the friends threatened the bride and eventually Samson was betrayed. Samson reacted to this by going off to kill 30 people. The bride was then given to someone else. When Samson found out about this he went and burned some of the philistines crops, this lead to more tit for tat killing, including the bride and her family.

In all of these foolish exploits Samson was using the strength that God had given him for the wrong purposes. Even by the standards of the day Samson's actions are extreme and at no point does he seek God for guidance on what he was doing. That said, God was still using Samson's foolishness for His own purposes to free His people from the oppressive Philistines.

We are all given gifts by God, some ordinary, some extraordinary, but either way we always have the choice of using the gifts for ourselves or using them for God. Like Samson, the attractions of everyday life have a habit of getting in the way of our service to God.

Now at this point in the story Samson is appointed as a judge, or ruler, of Israel. This situation lasts for 20 years. Maybe Samson had learned from his mistakes and had settled down, maybe in this period he used the gifts God had given him wisely, but then comes the incident for which he is best remembered. Lust returns to Samson once again, and he sees a woman he desires; Delilah. Now, we know that sin has consequences, and in this case it had quite severe consequences. Samson's enemies learned of this illicit relationship and conspired to bribe Delilah with a large amount of money to betray Samson. What follows is three instances of Delilah begging Samson to tell her the secret of his strength followed by Samson lying to her. His teasing of her was leading to a fall. She nagged him so much, for days on end, that eventually he gave in and told her about his hair. Armed with this information she promptly arranged for a midnight

haircut. Samson got what he deserved for his foolish actions and was led away in chains, had his eyes gouged out, and was forced to grind corn for the Philistines.

I saw on the news last week that one of the heroes of the lock-down, Captain Tom Moore, had been knighted by the queen. Afterwards a reporter asked Sir Tom what the queen had said to him. He replied that "that was between himself and the queen" No tittle tattle here then; Samson would have done well to follow Sir Tom's example, instead of just teasing Delilah about where his strength came from.

It was by God's grace that Samson had lived up to the promise, he had indeed "taken the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines", but now, all that seemed like a distant memory. The promise seemed hollow, but God had one last plan for Samson. You see his hair was growing back and so was his strength. And as he was led into the arena, in front of a baying crowd of Philistines eagerly wanting to see their enemy die, Samson called out to God. "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes"

We all have times in our lives when we know we haven't served God as we ought. Satan will tell you that you aren't good enough, that you shouldn't be pretending to be a Christian, that you should give up and live your life as you want, that God won't listen to you. But God's grace is greater than that. The truth is that Jesus is never more than a breath away. Samson cried out "Lord remember me". There is never a time or a day when God won't listen to us if we cry out to Him in faith. The letter to the Hebrews says that Samson did not receive the promise, but we have. By his death and resurrection Jesus Christ has paid the price for all our mistakes and failures. There are two important lessons from Samson's story. First, that we should always seek to use the gifts God has given us for His purposes, and second that there is nothing in your life that God cannot deal with. You are still useful to Him regardless of what you have done or how far away from Him you think you are.

Stay strong by walking closely with God and you will walk with Him for ever.



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