Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Watertown, WI

“Samson”

Rev. Aaron Reseburg

March 6, 2024

As I stated in my sermon a few weeks ago, we have quite a few children’s Bible books in our home. Having had them for almost three years now, I’m pretty sure I’ve read every one of them. At this point I feel pretty confident in calling myself a connoisseur. There are a few stories that always pique my interest to see how the book will handle it. Stories that have somehow made it into the children’s Bible cannon so people will expect it to be there but need to be watered down quite a bit.

The story of Samson is one of those stories. I think that it’s in most children’s Bibles for the sole reason that Samson is very strong. The trouble is that because he was very strong, he became a kind of superhero. There was even a child in my grade school whose name was Samson, and he competed in powerlifting competitions.

The first and most important tip to understanding the story of Samson, or any story in the Bible for that matter is context. Context. Context. Context. In other words, we need to understand what happens before and after a single Bible verse or story in order to truly understand what is happening.

Other than the occasional story about Gideon, you would be hard-pressed to find another story from the book of Judges in any children’s book. It makes sense as you look at the rest of the book of Judges. It is a book full of violence, promiscuity, godlessness, and more violence.

It begins with the Israelites in a state of disarray. They have followed Joshua into the promised land but Joshua is dead now. With him seems to go the faithfulness of Israel’s children. But God has decided that He will remain faithful to His people, and so each time that they fall away, God sends them a judge. The judge’s job is to save the Israelites from whatever or whoever is troubling them.

Before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, God made offered the Israelites two options. If they would follow Him and His commandments they would be blessed and prosper in the land. If they would chase after other gods and run away from their God, they would be cursed and would be overtaken.

The children of Israel continued to fall away from God, and when they did they would be overtaken by some of the other people around them. Each time, God would send them a judge. Someone appointed by God to save his people. As the book goes on however, the judges continually get more and more like the people that they are serving. Each judge seems to get progressively less and less faithful until we come to Samson, the worst of them all.

Samson is man who is driven almost entirely by his body. He is driven by lust, by hunger, by anger, by revenge, and just by mere impulse. He goes through the land seeking out prostitutes, killing, eating, burning down fields and homes. This is the man who is judging over the Israelites, this is their leader. His only redeeming quality is that he keeps the Nazirite vow which was placed on him from birth. The only time he seems to do anything good is when the spirit of the Lord rushes upon him.

Samson was born to a woman who was barren, an angel appeared to her and told her that she and her husband would conceive. But his parents were far from Mary and Joseph. Judges tells us that his Father obeyed the angel, but he didn’t know that it was an Angel of Yahweh right away. He thought it was a spirit of some other god.

Samson faces temptation and he falls. He marries a woman of the Philistines. He puts an impossible riddle to her family and tricks them into offering a large amount. His wife begs him to tell her the answer so her family won’t be impoverished, he tells her and she tells them the answer so they won’t have to pay samson. In order to pay his debt, Samson goes to the next town and kills 30 men and takes their things for a payment. He then abandons his wife in anger.

He comes back and finds her given to another man so again he goes into a rage and burns down the fields of her village which causes the villagers to burn his wife and father-in-law. This act kicks off war between Judah and the Philistines, many men are killed, and much violence happens because of Samson’s greed.

Next, Samson’s lust takes over, and he first finds a prostitute, then he finds a woman named Delilah. Delilah does not love Samson, but he doesn’t care. She tries to have him killed several times, but it doesn’t faze him. Finally, his lust for Delilah causes him to give up his Nazarite vow and he tells her if his head is shaved, he will lose his strength. His hair is cut, and his strength is gone, the Lord left him. His eyes were gouged out and he was paraded around as the spoils of War.

Finally, his lust for revenge is kindled when he is taken to a pagan worship service where he asks the Lord for his strength once more so that he can kill himself and all those in the temple.

Samson was no hero of the faith. He was motivated by lust, by greed, by anger, and by revenge. Yet even in the darkness and chaos of Samson’s life we can see Christ. Samson had a miraculous birth, he had a specific calling from God, he faced temptation, he defeated the armies of the enemy, finally in his death the Lord leaves him and he defeated a large enemy who were celebrating his defeat.

In every one of Samson’s failures we see Christ’s Victories. He was not born of a barren woman but instead was born of a virgin. He was begotten by His father, and His father sent Him on a specific mission. He faced temptation but did not give in. He defeated greater enemies than a Philistine, He healed the sick and the blind, He removed sin. Finally, in His death, we see Him give His life for the sake of a great victory. He didn’t give His life for the sake of revenge, but instead gave it for the sake of life. God didn’t forsake Him on the cross because of His unfaithfulness, but God forsook Him on the cross because of our unfaithfulness and His faithfulness.

He took the punishment for all our sin and sacrificed Himself on the cross. In His death, He defeated death itself. He took down the pillars around Him, and defeated the greatest enemy we have. Now because of His death, death no longer has any hold over us. Though our bodies may die, we know that one day they will be raised again.

The reoccurring line throughout the book of Judges is: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” There was no king, only progressively fewer faithful judges. One day, Israel would be given a king and his name would be David. Yet even David, the king, would be flawed and sinful. One day a true King would come, one day a faithful Judge would come, Jesus Christ. He would live a perfect life, and His perfect life would cover our imperfect lives. His death would take the place of our death, and one day, His resurrection will be our resurrection. In the name of Jesus, Amen.