

Separation and Strength; a Lesson From the Life of Sampson

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon explores the life of Sampson as a cautionary tale about the importance of separation from sin and the power of divine strength in a consecrated life.

Scripture: Judges 13:1, 2 Corinthians 6:17

Topics: "Consecration", "Separation"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the life of Samson as a cautionary tale about the dangers of mingling divine strength with human weakness. He emphasizes the importance of separation from worldly influences, as Samson's downfall stemmed from his disobedience and indulgence in sinful relationships. Despite his extraordinary gifts, Samson's failure to remain consecrated to God led to his tragic end, illustrating how sin can hinder God's purposes in our lives. Ultimately, Simpson calls for a life of total dedication to God, highlighting that true strength comes from being wholly separated for His service. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the redemptive power of repentance and the potential for restoration even after failure.

Transcript

"Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." 2 Cor. 6: 17.

Compare Judges, chapters 13-16.

The story of Sampson is an illustration of this text. The principle of which Sampson's life is a sad embodiment is set forth in the symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the iron and clay mixed together, and the image partaking of the strength of the iron, but also, alas, of the weakness of the clay. This is the story of Sampson - divine strength mingled with human weakness, supernatural power hindered by the touch of earth and the taint of sin.

The story of Sampson forms one of the closing chapters of the period of the Judges. He had godly parents. The Lord appeared in a vision and promised the birth of a son, accompanying it with the most solemn injunctions -- first, that the mother should be separated according to the law of the Nazarites before his birth; and, then, that the child that should be born should also be a Nazarite from his birth and separated unto God from his mother's womb.

In due time the child was born and carefully brought up according to the divine command. His hair was allowed to grow in perfect naturalness, and he abstained from wine and all strong drink, and lived a life of abstinence and purity. On arriving at manhood the Spirit of God began to move upon him in the form of extraordinary physical strength. Along with this began the peculiar temptation of his life -- a tendency to self-indulgence and unhallowed associations with the daughters of the Philistines. This, at last, became the snare that ruined him.

His first error was to set his affections upon a Philistine maiden of Timnath, and to marry her contrary to the advice and wishes of his parents. On his way to her home he performed the first great exploit of his life -- the slaying of a lion in a thicket by the way. This marriage was a sad one, and ended in the murder of his bride and the family by the Philistines, followed by his retaliation upon the enemies of his country and the burning up of their cornfields by an army of blazing foxes that he sent across the country.

For twenty years he was the terror of his enemies. He used to boldly visit their towns and hamlets, usually in some doubtful associations with one of their women, but he defied their attempts to take him; until at last, through the snare of Delilah, to whom he had rashly given his love and confidence, he was betrayed into revealing the secret of his strength and fell into the hands of his foes, who bound him and put out his eyes and then immured him for the rest of his life in a solitary dungeon.

There he deeply repented of his sin and folly, and God heard his prayer and gave him one more opportunity to use his colossal strength for God and his country in the last act and tragedy of his life, the pulling down of the vast amphitheatre, in which he had been led forth to make sport for the Philistines, and he and his enemies together perished at the last; but those that he slew at his death were more than all those he slew in his life.

He passed out of Jewish history -- a marvelous example of what God might have done with a thoroughly separated man, and yet of what self-indulgence and sin can do to hinder the most glorious promise and the most gracious purpose of God.

I. We see a bright beginning, full of glorious promise and possibility. We see God choosing a human life and revealing a high and mighty purpose for a human career, and then we see all this hindered and defeated by earthliness, selfishness and sin. What more could God have done to show His purpose of love and blessing? Twice He came in vision to announce the birth of Sampson, and again and again He manifested His supernatural power in the life of His servant, and the mighty possibilities which He was ready to accomplish if He could only have found an obedient and faithful instrument; and yet all this was baffled and hindered by the disobedience and folly of the man whom He had sought to bless and use.

It is a very solemn and awful thing to think how we can hinder God's purposes of love for us. Oh, ye, who have been born of holy parentage; ye, whose childhood has been environed with every holy association and every godly influence; ye, who are the children of a mother's prayers and a father's faith; ye, whose early days have been overshadowed by the very wings of the Almighty, and whose inner consciousness has felt the touch of heaven and heard the whisper of your high calling; remember that, after all this, you may, by your wilfulness and folly, destroy even your own blessing and hear your Master say at last, as He said to His own of old, "How often would I, but ye would not."

II. We see the necessity of a life of separation and entire consecration, if we would become the vessels of the Holy Spirit and the instruments of God's highest blessing. The Nazarite, under the Mosaic institutions, was the peculiar type of a life of separation. He was set part from his childhood to be dedicated peculiarly

unto the Lord and separated from all earthly and sensual indulgences. Just as the priest represented the idea of nearness to God, the Nazarite and the Levite represented the idea of separation to God.

This is one of the profoundest principles of God's whole plan of redemption. From the very beginning God purposed to separate a peculiar people unto Himself. We see this in the separation of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel and the Church of Christ, which just means the called-out ones. The very name "Ekklesia" signifies "the separated ones." Man's failure to meet God's thought in this has been the cause of all the failures and disasters of the past. The awful wickedness which preceded the flood was brought about from the mingling of the holy seed with the people of this world, the intermarriage of the children of God with the daughters of men. And in these times the same cause is about to produce similar effects. There is a melting away and a breaking down of all barriers between the church and the world, and the end of it is going to be a condition of things as shocking and terrible as in the days of Noah, and the progeny of such frightful and monstrous unions will once more bring upon the earth a deluge, not of water, but of fire, to sweep the godless race away.

God must have separated vessels. He will not drink out of the devil's cups. We must not only be His, but His alone, bear His monogram, and be His peculiar people. Oh, ye, who bear the name of Jesus and are playing with the world, receiving its attentions, intermarrying with its people, allowing it to invade the very church of Christ and in the name of religion turn God's holy sanctuary into a place of social entertainment and sometimes indecent exhibitions that would even disgrace a theater, you are opening the floodgates of the coming judgment; you are inoculating the body of Christ with the very poison of leprosy; you are draining all the fountains of spiritual life and power; you are repeating the story of Sampson, and the end can only be the same that came at last to him -- blindness, bondage, paralysis and death. "Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

III. We see in Sampson a picture of the supernatural life and power that God can give to a consecrated body. Sampson was not a physical giant; at least, there is no reason to suppose this. The Philistines could not understand his supernatural strength. If he had been like Og or Sihon or Goliath, of gigantic stature, they would easily have comprehended it, but he seems to have been a man of ordinary appearance and his power was entirely superhuman. It was not through brawn nor bone, but it was because of the divine life that possessed his being and filled his frame with the very strength of God. Just as the electric wire, when filled with the current, has in it the whole power of the battery and can turn the ponderous wheels of a mighty factory, so a human frame may be so possessed with the Holy Ghost that the feeblest may be like David, and David like the angel of the Lord.

There is no doubt that David attributed his stupendous exploits entirely to the physical strength that came to him from Jehovah. His battles were all battles of faith, and he could literally say, "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." We have seen the power of demoniacal possession sometimes in a human body, so that an insane man had the strength of a dozen men. Why should not the Holy Ghost be able to give the same power to a human arm?

And so Sampson was able to wrench asunder the jaws of the lion, as he would a kid, to carry on his shoulders the pillars and gates of Gaza with their weight of tons and walk with them ten miles to Hebron, and to lift up the pillars which supported the vast amphitheater and literally tear the building to pieces by his arms.

So, still, God is able to put His strength into a human frame, if wholly separated unto Him, so that it can resist the power of disease; can throw off the influence of a poisonous climate; can endure hardship and suffering, and can go through life, like Moses, with unabated strength until life's work is done. The Holy Spirit has this for His separated ones in these last days. It is part of the purchase of Christ's redemption and the partnership of His resurrection and ascension power, and if we are but empty of all that hinders and open to His unrestricted life and power He will dwell in us, and make us to know the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward, according to the working of His mighty power which He brought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies.

But not only was Sampson an example of physical power, but also of God's supernatural working in the circumstances and providence of life. When he was ready to faint with thirst after the victory over the Philistines when he had slain a thousand of them with the jawbone of an ass, he cried to God in his extremity, and God opened a fountain of water until he was satisfied. There is a realm of natural forces and providential surroundings where faith may still claim the interposition of our Almighty Lord in all the emergencies and circumstances of life. While the Spirit dwells within us as the source of every needed grace, the Son of God is reigning on His Father's right hand. He has said to His disciples, "All power is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth; and, lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age." This mighty Christ is able to do anything for us that we really need in the line of His purpose for us and the work He has committed to our hands. Are we proving all the power of Jesus' name and all the possibilities of the Spirit-filled life?

IV. We see the withering touch of earthliness and sin. Very gradually did the poison insinuate itself into Sampson's life; very gradually did he allow the snare of temptation to weave its meshes around him, until at last he was a bound and helpless captive in the power of his destroyer.

First comes the visit to the enemy's country. He had no business to go down to Timnath in the first place, except as God might send him as a soldier and as a judge; but he went, and then he looked, and then he loved, and then he longed, and then disobeyed his parents' counsel, and then he took the fatal step which linked his life with the daughter of his enemies.

Yet God did not forsake him immediately. Again and again He showed His power with His servant through a score of years and helped him out of his troubles, and doubtless often spoke to his heart and warned him of his danger and folly. But Sampson still went on in the same self-indulgent course, only getting, as we always do, deeper and deeper into the mire of lust, until at last we find him at Gaza in the house of a woman of ill repute, and at last we see him in the valley of Sorek in the lap of Delilah, who represents the world's delights and the very abandonment of selfish pleasure.

But even there an instinct of self-preservation and peculiar sacredness seems to have lingered to the last. This evil woman, Satan's master-piece of temptation, had been urged by the enemies of God and of Sampson to find out the secret of his strength. They had offered her a bribe of three thousand dollars, which in those days was worth ten times that sum. It would secure her affluence and honor. And for this she sold herself, and determined that Sampson should sell himself, too. With wily tact and womanly pleading she began begging him from day to day to tell her his secret, and, at last, appealing to his nobler nature, to his manly, generous impulses, to his love, she told him that if he loved her truly he would trust her without reserve.

Ah, it was his heart that betrayed him at last! Dear one, perhaps you think you did not mean any great wrong. You never intended to yield your principles, your virtue, your conscience, but they did get the better of you; you trusted somebody and in a moment of impulse you were lost. So poor Sampson fell. So it is that the lost sheep ever goes astray. It is not a wolf. It does not mean any wrong. It is just a foolish sheep. It wanders, it forgets, it dallies and it perishes all the same.

Evil is wrought by want of thought

More than by want of heart.

Oh, how tragical is the picture of Sampson's last temptation and fatal fault! Oh, how the fingers of the devil felt for his very heart, closer and closer, until at last they stole his secret and crushed out his life. He knew that there was danger and he played with it, day by day, putting it off and still holding the citadel, but letting the enemy come nearer and nearer, as he told her that they might bind him with green withes and he would be helpless; and then she betrayed her true character, and he might have seen the fiend in the fond lover, as she called his cruel foes. Hastily, Sampson sprang to his feet and tore his bonds asunder, and drove them from his presence in dismay. Next, he told her that they might bind him with fresh cords and he would be helpless. And then, again, in the test, the cords tear asunder, and she fell, hysterically weeping, and told him that he did not love her, and pleaded for his confidence; and then his heart was touched, and, oh, how near he grazed to the very edge of the precipice! One trembles when they hear him talk of his Nazarite locks, and tell her that if she would weave them together he would be bound and helpless; and so she weaves them and pins them in a knot, and takes the pin of a weaver's loom to fasten them securely. And now she thinks she has him, and, again, the ambush of men is sprung upon him, and again Sampson springs through the meshes of his snare, and, perhaps, seizes the pin of the loom to beat them from his presence. How narrowly he has escaped! If he had but taken the warning! Oh, if he had but listened to the throbbing of his heart when the Spirit knocked! But a woman's tears and a woman's hysterical pleading at last conquered Sampson's own weak heart. God's hour of long suffering had reached its margin, not through Sampson's triumph, but through Sampson's failure; and the man who might have been a lighthouse on the shores of time must become a beacon on the sunken rock and the dangerous reef, warning others to avoid the place where he was lost. So, at last, the strong man bows; the surrender is made; the secret is told. Doubtless, he exacted from her the most sacred pledge, and she vowed she would never tell it. Doubtless, she swore all that he wanted her to keep his secret, but she had him lulled to sleep and the locks were shaven; the bribe was in her hands and the enemy was upon him. Sampson rose, as before, and shook himself as at other times, and thought he was as strong as ever. He knew not that the Lord had departed from him. The awful progression is completed. Lust hath conceived and hath brought forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

V. Sampson's retribution was as terrible as his sin.

1. He lost his strength, and spiritual paralysis always follows surrender to temptation and compromise with evil.

2. Next, he lost his liberty. He was bound and helpless in the hands of his foes. When once we yield to the enemy we have no power to keep from yielding again. Our defense is departed from us, and we are "given over to a reprobate mind to do those things that are not convenient." Eternal sin is the most terrible part of eternal punishment.

3. He lost his sight. When we yield to sin and Satan our eyes are put out by our enemies, and we cease to know the difference between right and wrong. Our once clear conceptions of God's high and holy will are blurred and blotted out, and we wander in the darkness, not knowing at what we stumble.

He became a sport and spectacle for his enemies, and they used him to grace their entertainments, to be a public mockery at their revels, to honor their false gods and put to shame the very name of the God he loved. The most terrible part of Sampson's punishment was to hear the shouts of his enemies as they boasted of the triumphs of Dagon over Jehovah and the defeat of Sampson and Sampson's God, he knowing all the while that it was his sin and folly that caused all this shame to the name of Jehovah, and the cause that he, above all men, was sent to guard.

But at last repentance and contrition came, and, in his humiliation, bondage and sorrow, Sampson at last awoke to the meaning of his life and asked God for one more chance to be true. To prove his sincerity and the deep reality of the death of self, he was willing to sacrifice his very life in his last exploit, and he only asked of God that he might die in the service of his country and in the destruction of his enemies. He was like the Roman nobleman that plunged fully armed into the chasm at the city gate, which none but he could fill. He was like the soldier who, having betrayed his colors, asked only that he might once more lead the forlorn hope on the battlefield, and die with his colors in his bloody hand and his life laid down in the midst of his enemies. Our service is never worth anything until our life goes along with it, and everything is laid down, even life itself, if God requires it. Sampson has always been looking after his own pleasure, but now, at last, Sampson is dead to self and ready for the noblest achievement of his life.

God takes him at his word, and one day in the height of a great national carnival, while hundreds of thousands of Philistia's nobles are crowding the galleries of the vast amphitheater, whose roof was supported by two great pillars in the center, and all were waiting for Sampson to come forth and make sport for them in his blindness, Sampson's strength is given back to him for one last achievement, and, gripping the mighty pillars, with one stupendous effort he tears them from their foundations, and with a crash of thunder and ten thousand cries of terror the building is in ruins and the proud boast of the Philistines is turned into a death shriek of despair. Sampson is victor in his death, and has accomplished more by dying than he had done in all his twenty years of living.

Beloved, by Sampson's death scene let us learn to die to self and sin, and then we, too, shall "wax valiant in fight, turn to flight the armies of the aliens and out of weakness be made strong."

Nay, more, let us see in Sampson's death the type of a greater than Sampson, whose death accomplished also the destruction of His enemies and ours, and taught us both how to live and how to die, He died for us that we might live, but He died for us that we might die, and in the power of His cross, with its holy sign translated into every fibre of our being and every service of our life, let us go forth to live for Him who died, in "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death."

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