

A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 16:1-31

Topic

No longer endowed with God's Spirit, Samson is captured, blinded, and sentenced to grinding meal in a Philistine prison

Title

"The Daily Grind"

Jim Croce sang, "You don't tug on Superman's cape." Normally it's good advice.

But in the feature film, *Superman 2*, the man of steel temporarily relinquishes his power because he is in love with Lois Lane. Only as strong as the average human, he promptly gets beat-up by a bully in a diner.

The waitress turns on the television to try to get things back to normal. Moments afterward the President of the United States, speaking on behalf of all the leaders of the world, announces that the planet has surrendered to General Zod from Krypton.

At the end of his scripted speech, the president yells out, "Superman, can you hear me? Superman, ***where are you?***"

Christian - Have you ever thought of yourself as having super powers? If you don't like the word "super," substitute "supernatural."

After all:

- A Christian is “a new creation” (Second Corinthians 5:17).
- The Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead lives within us (Romans 8:11).
- He Who lives in us is greater than the malevolent supernatural being who is the current god of this world (First John 4:4).
- We’re told that we can do all things through Jesus Christ strengthening us (Philippians 4:13).

I’ll bet you can think of a few other verses that highlight the supernatural power provided by the indwelling Spirit.

Since all that is true, why is it we do not always walk in victory? Why do we sometimes feel so defeated?

“Where are you, super Christian?”

Samson may provide some answers. Samson was something of a super man - empowered by the Spirit to do incredible feats of strength. But he did not always walk in victory, and was for a time at the end of his life completely defeated.

What was his downfall? Like Superman, Samson was in love, but it wasn’t with Lois Lane. He was in love with a prostitute who betrayed him for her own profit. He relinquished his power for her, only to be blinded and bound.

There is a similar love that can cause us to relinquish our supernatural power. It is the love for this present world. The apostle John warned us, saying, “do not love the world, or the things in the world” (First John 2:15).

Love for the world, and the things of the world, is at least one reason we might be defeated. Let's see if it's true of us.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Reckon That Your Strength Is Not Like That Of Other Men, and #2 Refuse To Relinquish Your Strength To Be Like Other Men.

#1 Reckon That Your Strength Is Not Like That Of Other Men

(v1-3)

I enjoy super hero movies. What I don't enjoy in some of them is super hero angst.

In every reboot of Superman, there's attention given to young Clark Kent having angst because he can't do the things the other boys do. He can't play football, for example.

Well, he could... But it would be pretty one-sided.

At some point he always exclaims, "Why can't I be like everyone else?"

Because you're Superman, that's why. Give me a break. Do I want to letter in high school sports - or save the world?

At many points in our Christian lives, sometimes daily, part of us can yearn for the world, and the things of the world. Our children provide a good example. If you are raising them to be godly, there's a separation from the world. They will eventually, then repeatedly, ask you, "Why can't I be like everyone else? Why can't I do what all the others kids are doing?"

As grown-ups, we don't say those exact words; but we can sometimes look longingly upon the world, and the things of the world, and be willing to relinquish our being strengthened to overcome the world in order to be like everyone else.

We need to quit with the angst. We're part of saving the world - by bringing forth the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to those who are perishing.

Is being a living sacrifice, and a disciple who daily picks up his Cross, worth it? You bet it is.

Samson's great strength is an illustration. What he was empowered to do *physically* we are empowered to do *spiritually*. We are therefore not like other men.

Let's see just how strong in the Lord Samson was, so that we can believe how strong in the Lord we are.

Jdg 16:1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

Gaza was deep in Philistine territory, and one of its major cities. Commentators are all over the place on why Samson "went to Gaza," and if he should even be there.

I remembered something interesting about Gaza. We're told in Joshua 11:22, "None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod."

The Anakim were Nephilim - the giant offspring of fallen angels mating with women.

Giants lived in the Promised Land until eradicated by King David. Perhaps Samson went to Gaza to confront these giants. He was, after all, Israel's hero.

Dug the dog in the Pixar film, *Up*, can talk through his electronic collar. As he's talking, he will yell out, "*Squirrel!*" when he is momentarily distracted by one running by. He loses his train of thought afterwards.

Whatever Samson's reasons for going to Gaza, he sees a prostitute and his hormones yell "*Squirrel!*"

Jdg 16:2 When the Gazites *were told*, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him."

There's some debate on whether or not this was a good strategy. All I can say is that Samson was a difficult target; this was as good a plan as any - at least on paper.

Jdg 16:3 And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

Samson decided to check-out of the brothel early. The gates of the city would have been locked and guarded. No problem - he just picked them up and carried them off.

I read a scholarly paper on the Gates of Gaza. Using the gates of other known cities as a model, the author estimated, conservatively, that the gates could have weighed as much as ten tons - two thousand pounds - or more.

If I did my research right, the world record for the clean and jerk is around 550 pounds. Samson lifted four times that.

I might add that it didn't matter if those gates weighed ten tons... Or a hundred tons. Samson wouldn't have strained under any weight, because it was God strengthening him to lift them.

A weightlifter holds the clean and jerk for just a few seconds. Samson walked an estimated forty miles to Hebron, some of it uphill. It may have taken him twenty hours.

It is an incredible physical feat. It's no wonder that none of the Philistines who may have been awakened dared to challenge him.

Samson removed and carried away the Gates of Gaza. **There are a set of gates that you obliterate.**

Jesus once said that the gates of Hell would not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18). Gates represent power. In context, Jesus was telling us that He would conquer the power of death and Hell. By His own death and resurrection, the power of Hell would be obliterated for those who believe in Him. Death would lose its fear.

Do you ever dwell on the fact that when you die, as a believer, you are immediately absent from your body and present with Jesus? Or that you might be raptured and never die? And that Jesus is preparing your heavenly home?

But it isn't just for eternity you are strengthened by the indwelling Spirit. It is for living *right now*.

I've pointed out before that Samson was an average Jew. He wasn't a musclebound gym rat. His strength came from God.

We tend to think that only spiritually musclebound believers can achieve victory in Jesus. You know, the guys and gals who never miss devotions, and pray all the time, and in every way seem practically perfect. (They're not, BTW).

We're learning from Samson that the average believer - any believer - is just as able to have victory in Jesus, because the power comes from the Spirit Who indwells us, and *not* from our will power or discipline or personal strength.

The average, everyday believer is "more than a conqueror" (Romans 8:37), enabled to be an "overcomer."

You **can** obey the Lord; you **can** say "No" to sin, reckoning yourself dead to sin but alive to God.

Maybe your problem isn't sin; it's a trying circumstance. You are empowered to endure.

First John 5:5 asks, "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Then your strength is not like that of other men. Reckon it to be true. Walk in that strength.

#2 Refuse To Relinquish Your Strength To Be Like Other Men

(v4-31)

You don't have to chase the squirrel. Samson didn't either; but he did, and it cost him.

Jdg 16:4 Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Since her name means "devotee," commentators suggest Delilah might have been a temple prostitute at the Temple of Dagon.

Samson fell in love with the wrong girl. It's possible to do that; it happens all too frequently. A Christian who is married can fall in love with someone other than their spouse. Guess what? It's wrong, and you should rather obey God.

Jdg 16:5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies*, and by what *means* we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver."

I'm guessing the Philistines knew that Samson's strength came from the God of Israel. They were well aware of the Exodus, and the conquest of Canaan by Israel. They would also have known the doctrine of Balaam - that if a Jew was walking with God, he was invincible, but if you could get him to disobey, God would discipline him for you.

I think they were wanting Delilah to get Samson to somehow cross the line with his God.

God is so gracious. You'd think Samson had already crossed the line. But God was still using him, still empowering him.

Jdg 16:6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength *lies*, and with what you may be bound to afflict you."

Jdg 16:7 And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

Jdg 16:8 So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them.

Jdg 16:9 Now *men were* lying in wait, staying with her in the room. And she said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength of was not known.

Samson must not have practiced situational awareness. Could he not surmise that there were Philistines "lying in wait?"

How crazy was Samson? The minute Delilah started quizzing him about his strength, and asking about bindings, he ought to have run out of her house. Instead he was drawn further in.

How crazy am I, if I toy with some sin? I know it wants to bind me, but instead of fleeing, I am drawn further in - thinking I can stop whenever I want.

Jdg 16:10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with."

Jdg 16:11 So he said to her, "If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

Jdg 16:12 Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" And *men were* lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.

I was struggling, trying to explain this, when I realized that the point is that sin makes you an idiot. If any of us are playing around with sin - it's idiotic because the devil is lying in wait.

Jdg 16:13 Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom" -

We can't be sure how old Samson was at this point; but he must be forty at least. His hair had never been cut, and to manage it, he wore it in seven braids.

China's Xie Qiuping is on record as having the world's longest hair, measured at a little over eighteen feet in 2004, according to the Guinness World Records.

Jdg 16:14 So she wove *it* tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom.

Jdg 16:15 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart *is* not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength *lies*."

Jdg 16:16 And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, *so* that his soul was vexed to death,

Jdg 16:17 that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I *have been* a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

Part of the Nazirite vow was that "All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy" (Numbers 6:5).

When the period of time you volunteered to be a Nazirite ended, you shaved your head as a sign you were done (Numbers 6:18).

By allowing his head to be shaved, Samson was announcing that he was done being God's Nazirite. In his case, since he was called by God to be a Nazirite for life, in order to judge Israel, it was like turning in his resignation.

Think of it like this: God wanted His judge to be a life long Nazirite. If Samson wasn't going to go Nazirite, then he wouldn't be judge - and that meant he'd no longer need the supernatural empowering of the Spirit.

There's something about his seven braids. Samson didn't have the scroll of Isaiah, or John's Revelation, but we do. In them we see that "seven" is used to describe the Holy Spirit:

- Isaiah 11:2 mentions seven attributes of the Holy Spirit.
- Harking back to Isaiah's description, in Revelation 1:4 and 3:1, the Holy Spirit is referred to as "the seven spirits."

Samson's seven locks of never-cut hair represented the Holy Spirit upon him, strengthening him. Cut his hair with his permission and it represented him relinquishing the Spirit.

Jdg 16:18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. Jdg 16:19 Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.

Samson was a sound sleeper, for sure. Even so, this is one brave hairdresser.

Jdg 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.

God did not abandon him; Samson was still saved. God withdrew the empowering of the Spirit. David would later write, "take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11), referring to His empowering.

If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit resides within you permanently. You can, however, forfeit His power. If you refuse to yield to Him, and instead yield to the flesh, you disconnect from His empowering. It's there but you're unplugged, as it were.

Jdg 16:21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison.

These ancient cultures loved to blind their victims. I came across this summary:

It was not uncommon for the king to punish a rebellions district by exacting so many pounds of eyes, and the executioners go and scoop out the eyes of those they met till they have the weight required. Sometimes the eyes were pulled or cut out; sometimes a red-hot iron was drawn before them. At other times the pupils were pierced, or destroyed, or they were taken out whole with the point of a dagger, and carried to the king in a basin.

The word used regarding Samson's eyes means "bored out."

You've probably seen depictions of Samson harnessed to a large grinding apparatus, the way an oxen would be. That's not accurate. He was doing woman's work, using a simple grinding stone and bowl, all day, everyday. It was humiliating, not a show of strength.

Jdg 16:22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

You'd think Samson would have a standing appointment with the prison barber. For whatever reason, the Philistines thought his strength would not return to him.

Have you ever sinned, then thought you'd never be able to recover?

I'm not saying there weren't consequences, but didn't you find that where your sin abounded, God's grace much more abounded?

Perhaps the Philistines could not conceive of grace.

EJdg 16:23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!"
Jdg 16:24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead."

Fictional fighter Apollo Creed has several nicknames: The Master of Disaster; The King of Sting; The Dancing Destroyer; The Prince of Punch; The Count of Monte Fisto.

Samson had earned nicknames for his exploits. I think we can be sure he did more damage to the Philistines in his twenty year career than what is recorded for us in Judges.

Jdg 16:25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars.

These were not feats of strength. They thought his strength gone. We can only surmise the awful humiliations they put him through.

They put him on display between two load bearing pillars of the Temple.

Jdg 16:26 Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them."

The once powerful hero was now able to be led along by a child. The Philistines did it to humiliate him.

Jdg 16:27 Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines *were* there - about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed.

I can't decide if three thousand is a total number, or just those in the chief seats.

Jdg 16:28 Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"

Samson was certainly sincere in repenting. We know he was, because God honored his request. Nevertheless he still had an "I" problem - as in thinking this was still somehow about him and not the glory of his God.

Jdg 16:29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left.

Jdg 16:30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.

We talk about suicide missions. The soldiers who volunteer for them don't want to commit suicide, but they know they are probably going to die. It's for the greater good and we honor them for it.

Jdg 16:31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought *him* up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

Who knew Samson had brothers? These heroes are just like us.

He did it imperfectly, but for twenty years Samson kept the Philistines at bay, giving Israel some rest.

Samson relinquished his strength and became like other men. He didn't know it was going to happen; but he should have.

That thing or that person you might be lusting after, or coveting... Is it really worth it to turn your back on the Lord, Who bought you, in order to experience what might bring a moment's pleasure but a lifetime of regrets?

What or who is it that makes you stop and say, "*Squirrel?*"

You've been delivered from sin and are not like other men. Don't be quick to relinquish your strength. God the Holy Spirit is in you. Yield to Him. Believe that God's commands come with His enabling to obey them.

If you're in a tough situation, but you know it is of the Lord, endure it in His strength.

You are not like other men... Don't lament it, and want to be like them. Instead be part of saving the world.

"Where is super Christian?" It's you.