

In the Shadows of the Son
Judges 16:23-30
Sermon for Second Week of Lent
Samson: More Killed in Death

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Samson's mother must have felt a little disappointed. Her long-awaited son, miraculously given as a special answer to prayer, didn't really turn as she had hoped. God's promise was that he would rise up and "begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." But while Samson was hard set against the Philistine men, at the same time he also appeared to have, shall we say, a weakness for Philistine women. He could have been great had he not so often been side-tracked by his passions. Some preachers have claimed that Samson missed God's purpose and calling because of his preoccupation with other pursuits. I'm not sure we can go that far, but I do think it's fair to say that Samson's mother mourned not only the death of her one and only son, but also the fact that he died in the prime of his life and was taken from her before he had a chance to straighten himself out. Who knows? He might even have become king.

In a certain sense then, neither did our Lord Jesus amount to all that much during the span of His short, thirty year life. Holy Scripture records how Jesus veered off into the wilderness right at the cusp of what could have been greatness. Indeed, the people wanted to make Him king, by force if necessary, but He would have none of it. Then there were all those scandalous things He said that forced His followers to turn away from Him, saying: "This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?" Jesus' own mother and brothers even appeared, at times, to be more than just a little self-conscious about some of His claims. St. Mark, writing in his Gospel, even records a time when they attempted to take Him home before His words caused Him too much trouble.

So, like Samson, Jesus also could have been "great" in the eyes of the world, but He too was sidetracked by other considerations. To be sure, they weren't considerations of the flesh, but they were considerations nonetheless. And what are we to make of the fact that Jesus Himself didn't appear to think all that much of His own accomplishments? After all, did He not say on one particular occasion that anyone who has faith in Him could do even greater things than He did? And while Jesus only managed to gather a few disciples to Himself during His short time here in this world, His followers who later came along, preached a single sermon, and added to the Church thousands of those who were being saved.

But getting back to Samson, it was no impressive, hulking form of a man whom the Philistine servants led into the temple Dagon to be mocked and abused. In fact, contrary to the way artists usually depict Samson, Scripture paints a picture of him as one who was quite ordinary and had no bulging muscles. There was nothing about his person that would have betrayed the immense strength God had promised to give him through the sign of his uncut hair. Nobody saw Samson's victory coming. All they saw was a weakened fool – a defeated man whose claims now seemed considerably smaller than they had been. They laughed and spit and scorned him as a man who could do nothing. You can almost picture them saying things like: "He saved others, let Him save Himself. He was sent by God! Let God save Him, if He wants Him." But it was then that Samson pushed with all his might and brought down the temple upon the heads of the rulers and upon all the people who were in it.

Could this not be an Old Testament picture of our blessed Lord Jesus? Could it be that his enemies completely underestimated the effects of all they were inflicting upon Him? The Lutheran hymnist, Paul Gerhardt, wrote in his famous Easter hymn: "The foe in triumph shouted when Christ lay in the tomb. But lo, he now is routed, his boast has turned to gloom." As Samson was mocked, so was our Lord Jesus. As Samson was abused by those who would destroy him, so was our Lord Jesus. As Samson would have to die at the hands of evil men, so did our Lord Jesus. Samson's prayer: "O Lord God, please remember me and strengthen me only this one time, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes," doesn't sound terribly different from our Lord's request, when He prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You." What shall we say about our Lord's death, other than that which was already said of Samson, the strongman who stands in the shadows of the Stronger Man? Regarding sin, death and hell: "[Jesus] killed many more when He died than while He lived."

Dearly beloved, the freedom Israel briefly enjoyed from the hands of the Philistines by means of Samson's death is but a small picture of the full, complete freedom which is ours through the death of God's Son, our Savior. Therefore even in this mournful season of Lent, all Christians may still rejoice and sing these words from Revelation 12:10 – "Now the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ have come, for Satan, the accuser of our brothers, has been thrown down." Amen.

And that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.