

**HIS HAIR BEGAN TO GROW AGAIN**

Judges 16:4-22

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When you hear the story of Samson, how do you imagine he looked like? Don't you kind of picture a big muscular guy? I do, too. But, was he really a big muscular guy? Now, when the Philistine leaders learned that Samson fell in love with Delilah, they came to her and said, "Coax him, and find out what makes his strength so great, and how we may overpower him, so that we may bind him in order to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver" (vs. 5). Now, were they serious? Of course, his strength was in the size of his body and muscles. They wanted to pay somebody to find out what seems obvious? Or maybe it wasn't as obvious as we think it would be. Maybe he was not such a big muscular guy like we imagined. Otherwise, how can we explain Samson's loss of his strength by simply cutting his hair? The Philistines' request seems to suggest that the secret of Samson's great strength was not so obvious and it almost required some kind of magic to overpower and bind him. If we can compare him to Hollywood superheroes, our imagination would have been more like Thor, but maybe he was more like Hulk, who is normally an ordinary looking person until he turns into a beast with great strength. All the episodes prior to today's reading in Judges seem to suggest Samson was showing his great strength only when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.

So then what was his secret? It wasn't his physical size or muscles. It was his identity. Verse 17 says, "So he told her his whole secret, and said to her, 'A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me; I would become weak, and be like anyone else.'" A nazirite is someone who is being set apart for God; he takes a vow to abstain from wine or any grape drink, refrain from cutting the hair and refrain from touching corpses or graves. It's like our practice of fasting, giving up food or something in order for us to allow ourselves to give full attention to God and to learn to rely on his strength. Usually, people would have its starting date and ending date for being a nazirite, but in Samson's case, God set him apart for life. An angel said to his mother in Judges 13:5, "For you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Notice, in this God's calling, there was his identity, namely a nazirite, and his mission, to deliver Israel. All of us are called with a new identity and mission. He set you apart with a new identity and mission. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

It was his identity that gave him a great strength. But, as he was revealing his secret to Delilah and she was cutting his hair, he lost his strength. Now then, was his strength stored in his hair? No, I don't think so. Then, would he regain his strength if he glued his hair on his head again? Would someone else gain strength if it was glued on someone else's head? I believe his hair was just a mark of his identity and God's presence with him. But, when he revealed his secret to Delilah and let her cut his hair, it wasn't simply losing his hair; he despised the identity God has given him. The New

Testament reading of this Monday was Luke 15, where Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. In this parable, when the son asks for his share of inheritance from his father, it wasn't simply about asking for money. It was about despising his relationship with his father. When you ask for a father's inheritance, you are saying you wish he was dead. When Samson's hair was lost, it wasn't simply his hair he lost, but he despised his own identity and threw out the God-given privilege.

Now, why would he do that? Why would he do something that he knew was not good for him? When I was reading today's passage, this was the question I was struggling with. In verse 6, Delilah says to Samson, "Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you." Hello? What kind of question is this? And what kind of reaction is this that Samson is showing? Why is he even with her? If I met somebody, who tells me, "I'm planning to kill you, but you need to tell me when you are alone," I'm not sure if I want to see this person again in my life. But, verse 4 explains it all: "[Samson] fell in love with... Delilah."

This is how Delilah coaxes Samson. The word 'coax' that appears in verse 5 is an interesting word. Its Hebrew word is *pathah*, meaning 'to entice, deceive, seduce' here. But, its literal meaning is 'to be roomy, be spacious, be open or be wide.' So, when the word is used to mean 'to entice,' it means 'to make one open-minded, simple or naïve.' This is how she accomplishes it. First, she says, "Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you" (vs. 8). Here, she flatters him. On her second and third attempts, she says, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies; tell me how you could be bound" (vs. 10,13). Here, she accuses him of being unethical in terms of mocking and lying, although it was her in the first place who is deceiving him. Then, her final attempt was the most devastating. She says, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times now and have not told me what makes your strength so great" (vs. 15). Again, that word 'love' appears.

When I was in high school, I was seriously addicted to computer online games. My parents tried everything to stop me from playing games for hours. Then, I would always think, 'If they love me, they should let me do what I want to do and just leave me alone.' Now, I look back, I'm glad they did not leave me alone, but did everything they could do to help me be free from my addiction. You see, not all love is healthy and good. Jesus warns, "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and *mammon*\* [KJV]" (Luke 16:13, NRSV, *\*Instead of wealth I used its original word mammon because mammon was the name of god of materialism at the time*).

We wonder how Samson could be so naïve at Delilah's words, but when he was overcome by his love for Delilah, who was clearly working for enemies, he could no longer serve his God and eventually he was pressured to despise his identity and privilege of being a nazirite. Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). Is he encouraging us to hate our family? No. He is telling us that the cost of discipleship is great and it may even risk our own lives, and he is warning us to have the correct order of priorities and to be prepared for the moments when you may have to make difficult decisions. When you are naïve about these and not prepared, you can be like Samson who

despised God-given identity and privilege. Jesus says, “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” (Luke 14:33-35). In other words, “Be prepared to let go of all things when you are pressured to make difficult decisions. Those moments may come, and when you are naïve and not prepared, you may despise God-given identity and privilege. Now, if you despise what I want you to be and what I want you to do in this world, how can I use you?”

I’m sure many of us have gone through what Samson had gone through. It is like a roller coaster; you have those moments of high points, when you feel the sense of God’s presence and sense of fulfillment. But, you also have those moments of low points, when you realize you messed up things. Verse 21 says, “So the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles; and he ground at the mill in the prison.” I’m sure many of us could somewhat imagine what Samson might have been thinking and feeling when he was grinding at the mill in the prison. “What have I done? What was I thinking?”

Now, God here has no obligation to help or rescue Samson. Remember the formula I gave the last week? **God’s Part (+ Your Part) = God’s Kingdom (+ Sense of Fulfillment in Your Life)**. He has been faithful to Samson all along, but it was Samson that screwed up. God has no obligation to take him up again. Yet, because our God is the God of grace, he chose to continue to be gracious to him, even before Samson asks God for forgiveness. How do we know? Verse 22 says, “But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.” Remember his hair was the mark of God’s presence with him. Yes, it says “the Lord had left him” (vs. 20), but God wasn’t through with him. He doesn’t have to, but he chose to be with him and to be gracious to him. This is our God. In Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, it says, “[the son says,] ‘I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’” (Luke 15:18-24).

Our God is the God of second chances. Yes, we screw up many times, but every time, if we come to him, he will forgive us and love us like only the Father can. We may have once despised what God has given us, a new identity and calling in our lives. But, it can always be restored. Just come to him and humble yourself. Then, you will realize he has already forgiven you and accepted you again. Romans 5:8 says, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” May God grant his grace abundantly on all of us. Amen.