

Sermon Text (Judges 16:18–30 ESV)

¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up again, for he has told me all his heart.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. ¹⁹ She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. ²⁰ And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him. ²¹ And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. ²² But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

²³ Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.” ²⁴ And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us.” ²⁵ And when their hearts were merry, they said, “Call Samson, that he may entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. ²⁶ And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, “Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.” ²⁷ Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

²⁸ Then Samson called to the LORD and said, “O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” ²⁹ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. ³⁰ And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

God Is Your Strength

Samson had received an incredible blessing from God. That blessing was physical strength. The book of Judges records many of Samson’s impressive feats of strength. There was a time when “a young lion came toward [Samson] roaring. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces” (Judges 14:5–6). There was another time when “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon [Samson], and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil” (Judges 14:19). And there was yet another time when, after Samson had been bound with two new ropes and left for the Philistines, “the Spirit

of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men” (Judges 15:14–15). And these are just three of Samson’s impressive feats of strength.

But did you notice something about these three feats of strength? During each of them, the book of Judges says that the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon Samson. Samson’s strength did not come from himself but from God. Therefore, these impressive feats of strength were not ascribed to Samson but were rightfully ascribed to the Holy Spirit. However, Samson had lost sight of this fact and repeatedly put God to the test.

Samson lived a sinful life. Among the sins that he committed, the book of Judges shows us that Samson had broken the Nazarite vow, a vow which he had been under since he was in his mother’s womb. The Nazarite vow was a special, voluntary vow in which a person consecrated himself (or separated himself) to God and gave himself a special, holy status. This vow required the person to avoid three things. God revealed what those three things were to Moses at Mount Siani. First, God said, “[H]e shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins” (Numbers 6:3–4). Second, God said, “All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long” (Numbers 6:5). And third, God said, “All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body. Not even for his father or for his mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head” (Numbers 6:6–7).

Samson had first broken the Nazarite vow when, after passing by the lion that he had killed a second time when he went to take a Philistine woman as his wife, he saw that “there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey” (Judges 14:8). Even though the Nazarite vow forbid him from touching anything that was dead “[h]e scraped [the honey] out into his hands and went on, eating as he went” (Judges 14:9). Also, while the book of Judges does not tell us that Samson drank wine, it is possible that he did, especially at the feast that he prepared to celebrate his marriage to his wife since it was customary at that time to drink wine at wedding feasts. In addition, we know that Samson had touched a dead body and had allowed his hair to be cut, so it does make sense that he may have also drunk wine.

However, regardless of if Samson had drunk wine or not, the fact remains that Samson saw himself as invincible. Nothing happened to him when he broke the Nazarite vow by touching the carcass of the dead lion, and now, in the verses prior to our reading for today, Deliah, having been bribed by the lords of the Philistines, had tried to subdue him three times, and he easily broke free each time. So, when Deliah made him feel guilty for continually lying to her about what his weakness is, he told 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 is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man” (Judges 16:17). Samson fully believed that he would not actually lose his strength if his hair was cut since we hear Samson say in our reading for today after his hair had been cut, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free” (Judges 16:20). However, as the verse continues, “he did not know that the LORD had left him” (Judges 16:20). God had been patient with Samson up until this point, but now, he allowed Samson to finally face the consequences for his continued disobedience and for trusting in himself rather than God.

How easy it is for us to think that we, too, are invincible. We may not think this due to our physical strength or other abilities, like Samson did. However, we can find ourselves thinking that we are spiritually invincible. The apostle John says in his first letter that “the blood of Jesus [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We can therefore be tempted to think that it doesn’t matter if we give into sin this one time or this other time because Jesus died for all of sins, including those that we haven’t even committed yet. However, this is a dangerous way of thinking. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:15–16). If you sin without repentance, thinking that it doesn’t matter because Jesus died for all of your sins, you are putting yourself at risk of shipwrecking your faith and becoming a slave to your sinful desires. You may think that your faith is invincible, but, as the apostle Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians, “let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Sometimes, the thing that we need when we are trapped in our sinful ways is a wakeup call. Samson’s wakeup call was that God took his strength away, the very thing that he thought made him invincible. Because of this, he was seized by the Philistines who gouged out his eyes, made him grind at the mill in the prison, and made him entertain them while they praised their false god. The wakeup calls that we receive may not be that extreme, but they can still have a great effect on us. As a result of our sins, we may end up losing our job, losing our possessions, losing our friends and family, or losing our health, possibly causing our bodies lasting damage. It is in these moments of suffering that we not only realize that we are not actually invincible but that we also realize just how vulnerable we actually are. And it is then, in the midst of our sufferings, when

we have no one else to turn to, that we realize that there is only one person we can turn to: God. So, we turn to God in prayer, asking him for forgiveness and trusting that he hears and answers our prayer for the sake of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

If anyone could think himself to be invincible no matter what he did, then surely it would be Jesus, the Son of God. After all, if we can find ourselves thinking that we are invincible even though we are mere humans, how much more would someone who is not just true man but also true God think that he is invincible. However, even though we may find ourselves putting God to the test by the way we live our lives, Jesus never put God, his Father, to the test. He never thought that committing one little sin here or there would be no big deal. He never thought that he was invincible, that he did not have to face the consequences of giving into temptations to sin. He perfectly followed his Father's will, not giving into sin even once. Then, just as Samson laid down his life to defeat the enemies of Israel, so Jesus laid down his life to defeat our spiritual enemies of sin, death, and the devil. By Jesus' death, he paid the price for all of our sins. And his victory was made certain by his rising from the dead. This does not mean that we can therefore do whatever we want without consequence, but it does mean that, when we do sin and we truly repent, we do not have to wonder if our sins are forgiven because Jesus did not put a limit on how many of our sins he forgave. Therefore, as the apostle John says in his first letter, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

After we have repented and turned to God, praying for forgiveness, the next thing that we will undoubtedly do is turn to God for his help in delivering us from our sufferings, asking him to restore our possessions; relationships; health; etc. After Samson repented and turned to God, he prayed that God would give him back his strength just once so that he may use it against the Philistines. God answered Samson's prayer by giving him exactly what he asked for, and God may

give you exactly what you ask for too. However, if God doesn't do that, it doesn't mean that he has not answered your prayer. It means that God has something even better in store for you. Therefore, when we pray, we pray that God's will be done, trusting that he knows what is best for us. By putting our trust in God like that, we are acknowledging that we are not invincible and that we need him. It is God who gives us the strength to endure until the end both physically and spiritually. Therefore, when you find yourself in trouble, do not think that you will get out unscathed because you are invincible. Rather, "call upon [God] in the day of trouble; [and he] will deliver you" (Psalm 50:15). Thanks be to God who is our strength.