

Filled With the Spirit Judges 14:1-7

How good must we be to be used by God? What does God need us to do to bring about His will for the world?

God doesn't need us. What could the Creator of Heaven and earth possibly need from us? But He chooses to us for His Kingdom. Sometimes in spite of ourselves.

Last week we talked about Samson before his birth. He was called into existence by the Word of God before the Word became flesh, Jesus of Nazareth. Samson was raised by parents who loved God, who followed His word, who were faithful and obedient to the Lord. They gave their son a solid foundation. He was truly a miracle from the Lord.

But Samson was anything but a shining example of faith. He was lustful, wrathful, vengeful, short-sighted, cruel, impetuous, childish, unrestrained, shameless, self-centered and foolish.

Yet, God used Him to set God's people from slavery and oppression to the Philistines. And Samson's legendary, super-hero-like strength, to do it.

But Samson's bulging muscles were not the greatest strength at work in him.

The Holy Spirit was the source of his strength.

We are told right at the end of Chapter 13 that the Holy Spirit began to work in Samson near his hometown of Zorah:

And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Judges 13:25

That's a great start for the story of a deliverer! For a Biblical superhero. You see a similar phrase all throughout the Book of Judges. We are told over and over again, that the Spirit of the Lord stirred in the other Judges of God's people, the ones who came before Samson.

More than three hundred years before Samson, the Spirit of the Lord stirred in a man named Othniel and he defeated the king of Mesopotamia, setting God's people free.

The Spirit of the Lord stirred another man named Gideon and he led God's people to victory against their enemies.

The Judge who preceded Samson was a man named Jephthah and he defeated the nation of Ephraim.

So, when we read that the Spirit of the Lord began to stir in Samson in Mahaneh-Den and we Samson's miraculous birth and his God-given purpose of setting God's people free from slavery to the Philistines, we begin to rub our hands together in anticipation of hearing some great work of faith.

What great and heroic act did Samson engineer, with the Holy Spirit stirring within Him?

He asked his Mom and Dad to get him a woman.

Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife." But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

Timnah was a Philistine village a few miles down the mountain from Samson's hometown of Zorah. At Timnah he saw a woman that impressed him enough that without even going out for a cup of coffee even speaking a word to her, wanted to get married.

And Samson's reason for wanting to marry this woman was simple, "She is right in my eyes."

If we know the Bible that phrase "right in my eyes" should set off alarm bells because it is the ultimate statement of doing whatever I think is right regardless of what God's law may say or God's will may be. It is a declaration of personal sovereignty rather than God's. Whenever you see the phrase in Scripture, "do what right in their own eyes" buckle your seatbelt for a bumpy ride because the people are ignoring God's will and following their own corrupted hearts.

But it didn't God didn't use them. It didn't mean God didn't have a plan for their life. It didn't even mean the Holy Spirit did work through them. But it was going to be painful.

Samson's parents, of course, didn't like this idea because God's people were not supposed to marry outside of the nation of Israel. Marriages to foreigners who didn't worship the Lord caused people to worship idols and false gods and lead them away from God. This woman's family likely worshipped the god Dagon who had the top half of a man but below the waist was a fish. God's people were supposed to tear down the shrines to foreign gods, not marry the people bowing down to them.

But that's not the only reason why Samson's parents were concerned. They also knew his God-given mission was set their people free from the Philistines. How could he accomplish that by yoking himself to the Philistines?

It was a legitimate question.

His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

Judges 14:4

Does God work through our shortcomings? Does God overcome our selfish desires and our instinct to do what is right in our eyes rather than what He says is right? Is God's grace greater than our sin?

The Church Father Augustine put it like this:

Christ is not faithless, from whom the faithful man receives not guilt but faith.

God is faithful to us and faithful His purposes He works through us, even when we are not.

During the second and third century, when the Church was being persecuted by Roman Empire, some priests and bishops recanted their faith in Jesus. Rather than go into the arena and face the lions and gladiators and be ripped to shreds, they instead allowed their faith to be torn to tatters.

There were a group of Christians led by an African bishop named Donatus who did not recant. And they believed that any act a Christian did who recanted their faith was invalid, worthless and totally negated. The followers of Donatus said that if you were baptized by a priest who abandoned your faith, your baptism was not valid and you must be re-baptized. Donatists said any act of faith by a person who isn't morally pure is not recognized by God. For a few centuries, most Christians held this belief—which became known as Donatism.

The Donatists eventually died out because they were hyper-judgmental heretics who lived by the power of their own works rather than Jesus' grace.

But the idea of Donatism still carries on today in cancel culture—that we should be cast out and not heard from again because of something we did. It carries on in practicing works righteousness—trying to prove how good we are, to anyone who may be watching, in order to validate our existence.

God doesn't need our great works. He created everything we see with a word before any of us ever existed. He holds it all together—every atom in our body, every star in the sky by the sheer power of His will. God doesn't need us to do anything. Instead, He chooses to work through us by the power of the Holy Spirit—even if we are imperfect. Even if we are a mess.

Samson is proof.

Samson and his parents, following his wishes, walked down the mountain toward Timnah. And along the way they encountered a danger they did not and God rushed to help Samson and his parents.

Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes.

Judges 14:5-7

A couple of times I have been on a morning run out in the country and have come across a herd of wild, feral hogs along the road. The last thing on my mind was grabbing one by the tusks and ripping him apart to make a pork sandwich.

But I did think to pray! Boy did I pray! And God got me through. And the hogs went their way and I went mine.

In Samson's case, the Spirit of the Lord, rushed upon him, filling him with strength and Samson tore the lion to pieces like he was ripping apart a stuffed toy. The Holy Spirit empowered Samson. The Holy Spirit filled him with strength.

This is the Spirit's work in our life. The Holy Spirit equips us for the task that God has laid before us. The Holy Spirit empowers us, gifts us, works in us and through us for whatever task God has given us. God delights in working through us. He could do whatever task he calls us to do on His own. God does not need us...for anything. But He loves us so much and He has such a grand vision for our life and for what we have been made to be that He chooses to work in us and through us. God does not need your good works. But He delights in those good works He does through us. The theologian Tom Oden put it like this:

It is unthinkable that a prize offered to parents for the talent of their children might suddenly become more important to them than the joy of actually touching and embracing their children. The token is hardly in the same class with that which it betokens. So it is with God's delight in the life of human creatures made and restored in the divine image. God's experience of humanity is in itself God's delight, whatever their products or achievements or results.

God is not after your works. He is after a relationship with you.

Samson and his parents arrived in Timnah. He finally spoke with the young Philistine woman he was trying to marry and we are told again that "she was right in Samson's eyes."

Now believe it not, this was the high point of Samson's life. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit and engaged to a beautiful woman. He was an instrument of the Lord with a tremendous purpose, setting God's people free from slavery to their oppressors.

It was good for Samson.

The Christmas before Jen and I were married, I led Christmas Eve service at the church where I was an Associate Pastor. I wanted to celebrate Christmas with her and my parents and my sister in Kansas City so I planned to drive all night hauling a trailer from Tennessee.

A man from the church, who got wind of my ambitious plan, pulled me aside and said, "You have the world by the tail right now. Make sure you make good decisions."

Samson had the world by the tail, everything stretching out before him full of promise and he did not make good decisions. And from this point forward his destructive tendencies began to get the best of him and destroy his life and the life of those around him. Still through all the destruction, all the trauma, all the betrayal, blood and death God weaves the golden thread of his purpose.

And it all started with something simple—something that tempts all of us—feeding our appetites.

As Samson went back down Timnah to prepare for his wedding, he turned aside along the road where a few weeks before, he ripped the lion to shreds. And Samson saw that some honeybees had built a hive in his carcass. Samson reached inside the carcass of the dead lion and scooped out some honey to eat. This was a problem.

First, that's really gross. That honey was definitely not pasteurized.

More importantly, Samson was a Nazirite. And part of the Nazirite code was to not coming in contact with any dead body—be it animal or human. So Samson, worked against what God made him to be.

It would not be the last time.

We are told Samson didn't tell anybody about his sweet dead lion body snack—even his parents.

When Samson got to Timnah, the wedding was on. His father made all the arrangements. And Samson even cooked a feast for the wedding party. Yes, Samson was a five-tool player—handsome, strong, he could even cook and party plan and we'll see in a minute that he knew how to dress.

And everything was going well, so very well. He was married to the woman of his dreams. Everyone was having a good time at the party. Samson had basically learned the skill of turning a dead lion into crock pot. And then Samson had to go and ruin it all—but remember this was all under the Lord's sovereign will and way. The Lord was able to use even Samson's base instincts, his sinful impulses in His plan.

Samson's appetite led him to break his Nazirite vow to eat honey from the lion and Samson's pride led him into war with an entire nation of people. For some reason Samson, in the middle of his wedding feast, decided to pose a riddle to the people at the feast because who doesn't love people who go around asking party guests to solve obscure, opaque riddles. And Samson bet them they couldn't solve it.

And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it." And he said to them,

**"Out of the eater came something to eat.
Out of the strong came something sweet."**

Judges 14:12-14

Of course the riddle referred to Samson scooping honey out the lion—an event that he told no one about—not even his parents. It was an unsolvable riddle. And Samson and his guests bet 30 wedding garments and 30 changes of clothes—60 outfits—that they couldn't solve the riddle.

Am I the only one here thinking that Samson just wanted to find a way to tell someone he had killed a lion with his bare hands?

The wedding feast lasted seven days. After three days they couldn't solve the riddle. On the fourth day, the wedding guests went to Samson's new wife and said, "You have to tell us the answer to this riddle. If you don't we will set you and your father on fire."

This is where things begin to fall apart. Anytime you threaten to set your host and the family on fire, the party is really over at that point. It only got worse. Samson's new wife was understandably upset and she began to cry constantly. She demanded of her new husband "You have to tell me the answer to this riddle." And rather than tell Samson that their wedding guests were going to burn her and her father alive—which Samson the superhero could have done something about—she instead tried to guilt him into telling her. She started asking him on the fourth day of the feast. And she cried for the rest of the feast, the whole of the seven days—which is not exactly how you want your honeymoon to go.

And Samson finally caved in. It would not be the last time Samson was undone by telling a woman his secrets.

Samson told her about the lion and the honey.

Samson's wife told the party guests.

And the party guests solved Samson's riddle.

Samson immediately knew how they found out but it didn't matter because he still owed these men 60 changes of clothes.

Samson decided he would just take the clothes he needed to pay of his gambling debts. Once again, remarkably, the Holy Spirit rushed into help Samson.

And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house. And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

Judgers 14:19-20

So, Samson's brief marriage was over after a week and the woman he loved was married the best man instead. Samson's list of sinful practices and habits continues to pile up. He can't control his appetites, pride, theft, wrath. And it begins to cost him.

At this point, right, surely God abandoned his plan to set his people free through Samson. The guy was a loose cannon. He can't be trusted. He sat at his parents house, pouting, without his wife, his Nazirite vows broken, having stolen sixty garments. Who knows what he might do next?

So, God looked another way to set His people free. There was surely someone else. Someone clean and pure who would take the seriously responsibility of deliverer.

Right?

Wrong.

God was determined to set His people free through Samson.

Jesus does not change His mind and He is making all things new.

There are some of us here today who believe, wrongly, that God has given up on us. There are some of us listening to this message who have something in our past or something in our present that we believe disqualifies us from receiving the Holy Spirit. There are some of us who once had a vision for the work the Lord might do in us and through us but the Donatists of this world, who are deeply invested in their own works righteousness, convinced us to settle for something else.

The story of Samson is the story of God's imperfect, sinful, broken people and how God works through us, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

Sin is costly. Samson's sin cost him everything. Our sin costs us. Sin is painful. Samson's sin led him from being married one day to sulking in his parents' basement the next, with his wife gone forever.

But do not allow the pain of your sin or even the guilt you have not given to Jesus, laid at the foot of the cross, cost you the absolute joy and privilege of the Holy Spirit of the living God working through you to be an instrument of God's freedom in this world. Don't let this world deceive you. Jesus has a plan.

God chose to work His perfect purpose through an imperfect man like Samson and Jesus can surely work through a flawed and broken person like you and me.

Next week we'll see that people will choose the comfort of slavery to the uncertainty of freedom and how God calls us to proclaim liberty to the captives.