

**Sermon for Pentecost 16**  
**September 24, 2017**

**“Leaders Led by God”**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from the God of almighty grace. Amen.

Fellow servants of God, in the New Testament book of Hebrews, chapter 11 of that book of the Bible lists “heroes of faith.” That list includes people like Abraham, Moses, and David. It also lists some lesser-known people, among them, Samson.

If you are fresh on the account of Samson’s life, you might join the many others who have wondered, “How could Samson be listed among the heroes of faith?” We only had a snippet of the material between our first lesson and the third lesson, but the entire Bible account between those lessons shows Samson disobeying God, and seemingly getting away with it. Samson would make a great action movie, but if the director didn’t tone things down, it would be rated R for the blood, gore, sex, and language.

How could God use Samson?

We read in the first lesson that Samson’s birth was announced by God himself! And we learned that Samson was a Nazirite. He was set apart for God’s special purpose, and to demonstrate that special purpose, there were outward signs he was supposed to keep. No alcohol. No touching dead things. No haircuts. Usually in the Bible, a Nazirite vow was taken voluntarily and was temporary. In Samson’s case, he was assigned from birth to be a Nazirite, set apart to do specific, special work for God. Samson’s purpose was to begin overthrowing the Philistines who were ruling over the Israelites.

In the four chapters of Samson’s life in the Bible, we see him breaking all of those rules, even though God gave him incredible strength to be a one-man army against the Philistine nation. He had the strength to rip a lion apart with his bare hands, but later touched the dead carcass. When the Philistines came to arrest him, he chose as his weapon the jawbone of a dead donkey. God still let him kill 1,000 men of the arresting force. It’s implied but not stated directly that Samson didn’t hold back from alcohol at his bachelor party. And eventually, he told Delilah in our second lesson, that cutting his hair was part of his Nazirite status. Maybe he didn’t care because he had broken all the other commands already without any reduction in his strength. Not to mention that Samson’s first girl was a pagan Philistine that was against God’s command for Israelites to marry, but he also enjoyed prostitutes and mistresses like Delilah.

As a guy to hang out with, probably quite popular. He was strong, clever, witty, and free-spirited. But as a Christian? He would have been on the elders list awfully quick with his lifestyle. He embarrassed his parents plenty with his sinful lifestyle.

How could God use him to do his special work? Didn’t it matter that he kept sinning? Samson is called a leader, a judge, of God’s people, the Israelites, but he was moral character sure doesn’t seem like it. It doesn’t seem like Samson was a leader led by God.

How about you? In what areas are you called by God to be a leader? Do you lead at work, or do you hold a position at church, or in the community? Husbands are called to be the head of the household. Parents are called to raise their children. Are you the leader God calls you to be? Or would you have to admit that there’s more Samson in you than there should be? Would people have a case to say to you, “How could God use you to do his work?”

Husbands, are you the head of the household? Or do you take the Samson approach, and if your wife nags you enough, you'll do what she wants, and if she doesn't nag enough, you'll ignore what she wants? Are you the leader who cares about all the people in your household, or are you more like the EBT processor who simply doles out what is necessary?

Husband, do you love your wife to the extent that Jesus loved the Church? Jesus gave up his life for the Church! Are you qualified to be a husband at that standard? Or have you taken a page from Samson's book and instead of loving your wife, you treat your relationship like a game, the way Samson kept lying to Delilah and making sport out of her? Have you visited a mistress, maybe not in person, maybe virtually, to whom you give your attention and desire?

Parents, do you set the example for your children that God expects? Do you discuss God's Word with your children when you get up and when you lie down and when you are at home and when you are traveling? Have you set the example of having God's Word on your mind and in your actions? Have you set the example of living your faith so clearly that it's obvious to people at the grocery store and at the bar that you and your family worship the Lord? Or does your lifestyle look a lot more like Samson, who knew the Lord, but didn't like to obey God's commands, and who seemed to be just as much at home among the pagan, heathen Philistines as he did among God's people?

How could God use people like us to do his work? All of us here can be happy that we read about Samson's moral failures in the Bible, and not our own, written down for all time for the whole world to read and know. How could God use us to do his work?

Grace. Grace is how God could use people like you and me and Samson to do his work, even though we fail time and time again, even though we don't live up to God's standards. Grace.

Grace is on display in the entire story of Samson. The Philistines were ruling the Israelites as a punishment from God for the Israelites chasing after idols. But God's grace put a limit on the Philistines, and so God raised up Samson to begin the process of overthrowing the Philistines. The Israelites didn't deserve to be rescued, but God still sent them a deliverer.

Grace is on display for Samson. He kept sinning, but God kept using Samson's sins to accomplish God's purpose of inflicting damage on the Philistines and weakening them. Grace is on display that Samson, through all his sins, wasn't killed. Grace that God took away Samson's strength, let his eyes be gouged out, let him be imprisoned and made to grind grain like a donkey. It was God's grace that humbled and broke Samson to finally get it: "Lord God, please remember me," he prayed. It was God's grace that Samson could die better than he lived. The passage of the day serves as a summary of what happened with Samson at the temple. God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

In life, Samson was powerful and strong and disrespectful and sacrilegious. At the temple, Samson was weak and blind and beaten – but God wasn't. And in that one action, God's power showed as Samson inflicted more death and damage on the Philistines then and there than in his whole life. God could use Samson because of God's grace.

Husbands, God can have you leading a Christian household, not because you deserve it, not because you've earned, not because you do a perfect job, but because of his grace, he forgives your sins and your failures.

Parents, God can give you precious children with immortal souls to raise up in Christian homes not because you deserve it, not because you have earned it, not because you're perfect at the job, but because of his grace, he forgives your sins and your failures.

Christians, how could God use sinful people like us to serve him? Grace. Grace that doesn't give us the death and hell that we deserve. Grace that gives us forgiveness. Grace that saves us. Graces that opens the doors of heaven by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross because of his great love for the Church, to make all believers spotless and clean so that God can look at us and see holiness, righteousness, and perfection.

In light of God's grace, let's change the question. How can God use us to do his work? What options do we have for serving the God of grace? How can God use us?

Husbands, you can serve our God of grace by leading your household in service to God. Yes, that means you'll will take the lead, and understand that you are the resident pastor to your wife and children at home, and as such, you can lead your family in worship – devotions and prayers.

Husbands, you can serve our God of grace by loving your wife with Christ-like love that's willing to listen, care, understand, and that's willing to put your mind and strength to work to provide for your all your wife's needs.

Parents, you can serve our God of grace as you clearly demonstrate the priority of worship God in your life, that even when you have something going on that you don't come to church, God isn't getting bumped from the schedule completely or shifted into 10<sup>th</sup> place. And you can serve our God of grace as you show your children that God is part of your life and their lives all day long.

Christians, you serve the God of grace, who has forgiven your sins, and replaced them with holiness. Holy people, you can serve God. Amen.

**Text:** *Judges 16:23-31*

*Samson turns to the Lord for strength to demonstrate God's power and attack the enemies of Israel.*

Now the Philistine leaders gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said: Our god has handed over our enemy Samson to us.

<sup>24</sup>When the people saw him, they praised their god and said: Our god has handed over to us our enemy who destroyed our land and who multiplied our dead.

<sup>25</sup>When they were in good spirits,<sup>[a]</sup> they said, "Bring Samson here to entertain us." So they brought Samson from prison, and he entertained them. They had him stand between the pillars.

<sup>26</sup>Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, "Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them." <sup>27</sup>The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. <sup>28</sup>He called out to the LORD: "Lord GOD, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes." <sup>29</sup>Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left. <sup>30</sup>Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life.

<sup>31</sup>Then his brothers and all his father's family came down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. So he judged Israel twenty years.