

“Sampson’s Cataracts, or Live Your Adventure”

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13 November 2022

Texts: Jonah 4:9-10; Judges 13-16

Sampson’s eyes. **She is right in my eyes.** (Judges 14:3) **She pleases me.** Sampson knew what he liked when he saw it. And he went for it. She, the Philistine woman from the village of Timnah, attracted, drew (?) him into a self-centered, pursuit of pleasure that shaped his life from that point on. **I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines, get her for me as a wife.** (v. 2) She was an alluring foreigner and Sampson wanted to marry her so as to achieve intimate access to her as his wife. It would be tempting to dismiss this as “lust at first sight” except that we are told in verse 4: **But his father and mother did not know that it** (this whole marriage/attraction) **was of the Lord—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines.** Now Sampson was under a Nazirite vow (very like the prenatal vow his mother Tok!) (13:13-14) that because **he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.** (Judges 13:5) **This was Sampson’s divine purpose; it was the adventure designed by God for him. It will take an entire lifetime for Sampson to realize his personal and purposeful uniqueness!** He didn’t “see” it because he was occupied “looking at other things.” And other things included sex with a string of women: his first wife as arranged by God; then, possible, her younger, **better** sister (whatever that might mean!); then he consorted with a harlot at Gaza; and that brings us to **a woman from the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.** She proved lethally unfaithful to Sampson; she betrayed him for money after **he had told her all his heart—** supposedly “to win her heart” and prove the sincerity of his love for her. *She had no heart!* Then, came three betrayals: with **seven fresh bowstrings**, and then with **new ropes**, and finally with his **seven locks woven into the web of the loom**, Delilah set him up for assassination. In the first two instances he told Delilah how he should **become weak, and be like any other man; a dreadful conformity!**— then, skipping the third instance of betrayal, Sampson actually informs her that the secret to his great strength lay in his uncut hair—his uncut hair was a condition of his Nazirite vow(!)—and breaking that covenant, he would discover **that the Lord had departed from him. Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him in bronze fetters and he became a grinder in the prison** (that is like a bull in a grain mill!). It is also possible that Delilah’s betrayal put him off prostitutes for good! It is ironic that his enemies removed his most serious liability (his eyes, were put out the distractions ceased) because without them Sampson began to “see” things as they really were: such as his unique calling and purpose. Only then did he pick up the adventure of his life—*something solid, real, authentic and divinely approved*, and complete it. God has an adventure planned for each one of us!

The Nazirite vow included no wine, or fermented drink; no contact with the dead and no cutting of the hair (**no razor shall touch his head**). Sampson, having been raised under these conditions, knew that his drinking at his wedding in Timnah, and that his scooping the honey out of the dead lion’s carcass, and that by sharing the prohibition on shaving his hair with Delilah, his *femme fatale*, were three violations of

that vow. But he held his vow in contempt. In Judges 21:25 it is written: **In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** Sampson proved to be just like the rest of them in that but note the repetition of **in his own eyes.**

We might suppose that Sampson deeply loved his first wife; but she was given away to another. It is possible that her sister never measured up; and that his heart was so wounded by the marriage transaction, that he could never bond with another woman again and hence the string of paramours that led him to betrayal and death. It might soften the charge that he was a lustful man whose eyes engaged with the willing eyes of a string of lovers—all without progeny. Perhaps. It makes for a more nuanced story and makes allowance for our sexual appetite. What else accounts for the adventures of infatuations that besiege so many hearts today?! While we are busy seeking the “right one,” “dream of the day when Mr. or Miss perfect comes along and days of dreading that he/she never will as well as wondering what is wrong with me that no one seems to want me.” **We are distracted from, or blinded by our self-centeredness whether sexual or not and lose out on the greatest adventure of all: our calling, our walk with God.** Marriages are temporary, only for the here and now; but our walk with God is a forever thing by divine design. We want a more meaningful and “adventurous life” and, in seeking that fantastical one, we overlook the one we have in hand!

We are challenged to follow *our bliss*—but what if our bliss is more than this quest for romantic fulfillment?! What if the love we seek in infatuation is actually standing behind you as you scan the horizon in search of what might, or might never be? We are urged to follow our heart. To pursue the dream of whom I most want to be! Jonah, who was called to be one of the greatest evangelists in salvation history—he converted the entire city of Nineveh(!)—could have been remembered for loving plant life above human life and as a rebellious and resistant servant, a hater.

Sampson is a cautionary tale that teaches us to be wary of our heart’s desires and our instinct for adventure. Because the pursuit of adventure can turn out to be sordid, sad and wasteful rather than adventurous. What you glimpse in his story is an unflattering picture of yourself as a being whose “wants” and “wishes” make no sense, they do not integrate or harmonize but are “fractious,” discordant. You want to possess something and truly do not want to possess it at the very same time. You are a walking contradiction, at war with yourself and better equipped for farce, or folly, or tragedy and self-destruction than you are for either fulfillment, or success!

Not content with what his life provided, *with the adventure God custom designed for him!*, Sampson left home to pursue adventure—self-indulgent, yet passionate self-pursuit. He lived for the moment, the thrill, for whatever caught his eye. While he was out there, a ferocious lion attacked him. [In psychological terms, this lion could be viewed as Sampson’s *alter ego*, an embodiment of his dark/evil side, his Mr. Hyde—the monster within which, if one were conscious of it, Sampson could have controlled better!] He had no weapon to defend himself and, as yet, no

knowledge of his supernatural strength—a gift of God, given to shape his life as the deliverer of Israel. He tore the lion to pieces with his bare hands as if it were a young goat. He was pretty impressed with his physical strength. It was also a thrilling moment of great sensuality—the touch, the feel, the sights and sounds. It was a real trip of heightened awareness/aliveness. He stood up to a powerful animal and it didn't end well for the lion. *This is definitely not something you should try at home!* He **experienced, but did not realize what his greatness was for**. His strength was revealed instantly, but he didn't know what God would have him do with it—it was for his oppressed people. *A fuller answer: it was for Israel and the glory of God.*

It was all so strange, strong and shocking. Scary and isolating. He had heroic strength to do heroic things—something higher up than chasing pretty girls, sex and self-gratification. What should have been self-defining and soul refining turned out to be neither. Sampson told no one but continued on to his dalliance with the Philistine woman, **she pleased him well**. How petty, mundane and pedestrian that sounds—it was truly coarse, crude and low life; it beautified no one.

Shortly thereafter, when he returned to get her (as his wife?), he turned aside to see the carcass and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass. This is a most extraordinary thing, unusual and unnatural bees do not inhabit carrion and cohabit with flies and maggots. But Sampson never stops to inquire the meaning of these enormously sensual things! ONE SHOULD NOT TAKE THE EXPERIENCES OF THE LORD IN VAIN!! [The sound of bees, the smell of rotting flesh, the image of the hive waxed into the lion's ribs, the taste of the honey on his tongue, the feeling of extracting it from the carcass among other things! ALL ADD UP TO SOMETHING MIRACULOUS!] He was too caught up in seeing, touching and caressing his woman! But, the instant Sampson touched the carcass of the dead lion; **he defiled himself** and carried some of the honey, after consuming some himself, home to his parents. But he did not think things through and he did not tell them that he had broken his vow; or, as we might put it, he held the constraints, **the reins** of God in open contempt. He was flying blind! This was the beginning of the end for Sampson, spiritually speaking because shortly thereafter Sampson holds a feast at his fiancé's place. He drinks. And that was the second breach of the vow tied to his vows. I mention this to illustrate how little the laws, customs and rules of his people meant to him. He cast them off to party, drink and self-gratify . . . for sex. The good life, as we might say, but not the life God had in store for him. **Touching the dead, drinking, partying with strangers**—boasting, strutting and showing off before “his friends.” His companions brought **thirty (other) companions (the boys) to be with him and Sampson cooked up a way to secure thirty pair of linen garments** (wedding clothes were his responsibility?) **and thirty changes of clothing**. It was your typical tailgate party at a sporting event! Sampson proposes a riddle to them—a riddle wrapped up in the secret of his lion kill and the strange hive in its carcass. *Who could possible know the answer?*

Now note this: Sampson has openly exchanged the mysteries of God's leading in his life into a party trick, a cheapening act of self-indulgence—a drunken pun even. He had a complete lack of discernment of the greater adventure he was in on! He

had ***no sense*** of God acting through him or even behind the scenes. And some of us go through life in just that way! ***We do not take life as seriously as we should when we should (!) until it spins out of control and becomes terrifyingly serious for us.*** I suppose that many of us have been there and done that.

In desperation, the week allowed to solve the riddle was coming upon them, ***they enticed his wife . . . Tell us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours?*** (v.15) These are not nice people; they are M-13 thugs who want to win at whatever cost—they are what we might describe as gangsters, as arsonists, looters, thieves and murderers—just what one wants for a wedding party!. Streetwise, savvy and violent men . . . and oppressors of Israel. ***This is our introduction to Sampson's enemies; the very ones that he was raised up to destroy.*** Sampson declares he hasn't even told his parents, ***so should I explain it to you?*** (v. 16) We shouldn't miss the transfer of loyalties implicit here!

Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him (he became that ferocious lion!), ***and he went down to Askelon and killed thirty of their men, and took their apparel.*** (v. 19) He was so angry that he went back up to his father's house. ***Sampson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.*** (v. 20) Sampson was probably not aware of this betrayal and later seeks to act on his conjugal rights. The woman's father forbids him entrance and offers her younger sister. This shatters the commitment Sampson had with his wife—but the father would let his daughter be jilted.

Sampson leaves to take revenge, and captures three hundred foxes, ***turned them tail to tail with a flaming torch between their tails*** and loosed them into fields of standing grain. The fire took out the fields, the Philistines' vineyards and the olive groves. Things have escalated. ***I guess one could call this adventure! But it resembles a revenge film, full of sex and violence and a settling of scores only the ante is always upped instead. So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.*** (15: 6) I take this horrific murder to be most traumatic for Sampson; if he could never love again, ***this would be why!*** He could never risk commitment after this. Sadly, such life altering things do happen. It was God's occasion for it turned Sampson against the Philistines fully and finally.

Since you would do a thing like this (this homicide), ***I will surely take revenge upon you, and after that I will cease. So*** (wild with grief and inflamed!) ***he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter*** (what exactly ***hip and thigh*** means, no one seems to know anymore), ***then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam*** (near Zorah). (vv. 7-8) This situation is very similar to the condition of the Gerasene demoniac who Jesus delivered. Both men became a terror to all.

Now, as if we weren't witnessing war before, the Philistines come up ***to arrest Sampson, the men of Judah tie him up and deliver him to Lehi,*** there he breaks free and becomes a killing machine and ***with the fresh jaw bone of donkey, he***

slew a thousand men. And (having overthrown the Philistines) he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

The fact that Sampson couldn't love a woman healthily again after the murder of his wife, doesn't mean he became celibate. Far from it, harlots were his downfall. **Sampson goes to Gaza** and cohabitates with one. The Philistines decide to lie in ambush for him at dawn but at midnight he arises, tears up the ***gates of the city . . . carries them, posts and all, up to the top of a hill*** and his assassins change their minds. **And after that he loved a woman in the Valley or Sorek whose name was Delilah** (16:4ff) but she did not reciprocate that love. She betrays him repeatedly.

This was no great adventure of love—she capitalized on Sampson, gained wealth with his betrayal for spare change, just like Joseph's brothers and Judas.

“Why continue to love and toy with a woman determined to kill you? [Or harlots determined to destroy you? Proverbs 7:21-23. **Her house is the way to hell, Descending to the chambers of death.** (v. 27)] *Here's where your honesty is most needed.* Is Samson's dangerous game of love, sex and betrayal all that different than our own infatuations and temptations for romance and adventure?” (C. Replogle, p. 85) When we put our commitments up for grabs for one more sensual thrill, one more risk of exposure, a tryst, affair or an illicit love—one more (“just this once”) night of indulgence . . . one more conquest, or sexual adventure?” Delilah betrayed Sampson one more time and she was able to do that because he betrayed himself! The power was gone, the fight was gone . . . he had rendered himself **ordinary**. . . **just like every other man.**

Sampson had given his life to what he saw, **doing what was right in his own eyes.** And that is what blinded him. It can blind you, too. He had lived for the thrill . . . no one came to his rescue. His own people abandoned him. His last lover exchanged his liberty for a few coins. Sex and romance did him in! God's calling and great purposes for his life fell to his self-pursuit. It always does . . . our senses dulled, sated, exhausted . . . our vocation sold into slavery . . . because we yield to self-obsessions. Where God is abandoned and self becomes central, our whole world contracts . . . it becomes a trap and then we die.

Sampson's would have been hopeless and miserable in the end, ***if Sampson had not turned to God*** and, with strength restored, prayed for his eyes to be avenged and with that he toppled the Philistine regime . . . and ***that is what he wanted to be remembered for, that was God's vindication*** . . . that was a chance at a better ending to a better story. The blinded Sampson now could see.

Amen