

**“THE TRIUMPH OF
GOD’S POWER AND GRACE”:
THE CHURCH’S LIFE IN AND THROUGH DEATH
PART TWO
JUDGES 16
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- I. **GOD’S POWER AGAINST THE GATES OF HELL – 16:1-3**
- II. **SAMSON’S FOLLY WITH WOMEN – 16:4-17**
- III. **ISRAEL IN CAPTIVITY, IMPRISONED AGAIN BY THE EGYPTIANS – 16:18-22**
- IV. **THE TRIUMPH OF GOD’S POWER AND GRACE – The Church’s Life in and Through Death**

In our passage from Holy Scripture today, we see that tragedy becomes comedy because of the triumph of God’s grace. In the ancient world of literature a tragedy and a tragic figure were those who were greatly gifted and powerful who had a weakness that when found out would be that great and powerfully gifted person’s end.

When we read tragedy the reader sees the tragedy coming- -it’s just a matter of time until the weakness of the hero gets the best of his or her strengths. Tragedies end in a sad way, yet the sad ending is expected from the very beginning of the story. Folks are to learn from tragedies and see the human plight and condition through them.

In contrast, comedy in the ancient world (and today) was a person who was not necessarily that gifted, and has mean/average circumstances, who wins against the world, or lives happily ever after in the end.

In God’s redemptive story, only God can turn tragedy and a tragic figure into a comedy. Only God by his power and grace can triumph over man’s inherent and sinful weakness so that something good might come of it.

The cross of the LORD Jesus Christ is the great tragedy of God’s son dying a horrible death as a sad ending, only to be realized as a comedy with an ending that is actually a new beginning.

In our story of Samson, we have tragedy, but we also have comedy in that God is victorious over His and Israel’s enemies in the end.

As we left off last week, Samson was captured through the deception and manipulation of Delilah by the Philistines. Samson had fixed his eyes on another sinful woman and has

not learned from his mistakes- -he continually brings fire into his bosom thinking that he will not be burned:

ESV Proverbs 6:27-28: Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? ²⁸ Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?

As a consequence for Samson's folly and faithlessness, this time God allows His servant to be chastised and he is burned and scorched. As we read in Judges 16:

ESV Judges 16:21-22: 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.

Samson who was called by God before His birth to begin to deliver Israel from her enemies the Philistines, is now a prisoner of the Philistines!

The Great Serpent (Rev. 12:10ff) has captured God's Anointed at this time in redemptive-history. The man whom God had raised up to deliver Israel, is now serving the false Canaanite god Dagon in a Philistine prison!

As John Milton wrote elegantly in his poem *Samson Agonistes*:

*Betrayed, captived, and both my eyes put out,
Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,
To grind in brazen fetters under task
With this heaven-gifted strength?
O glorious strength, Put to the labour of a beast, debased Lower than bond-slave!
Promise was that I Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver!
Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke.*

Have the gates of hell prevealed now against the church?

Is there any hope for God's people to be delivered from their enemies? Will God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob come to pass? Will Israel dwell securely and at Peace-Shalom in the land with God in their midst?

At this point, it looks hopeless. If the Philistines destroy Samson who represents Israel, then destroys Israel as a nation, then the Seed of the Woman will be unable to be born and crush the head of the Serpent (cf. Genesis 3:15).

We see Samson shackled by chains of bronze, both his hands and his feet are chained, while he treads grain and/or corn like a dumb ox in Dagon's mill-prison. Samson is

humiliated, blind; he is as the Church of Laodicea described in Revelation 3:17:
“...Wretched, poor, blind, and naked...”

Samson has time to think about his calling; he has time to think about the consequences of his sin; he has time to see the irony of his eyes being gouged out: the eyes that caused him so much trouble and eventually caused him to be captured by the Philistines.

There is always hope and victory with God! No matter how dismal the situation may be; no matter how great the consequences for our sins; no matter how low the church has degenerated spiritually- -God’s power and grace will triumph in the end! God will keep his promises to them who love him!

Samson has time now in this lowly place to consider God’s power and grace- -and to come to repentance. God often will bring his people low into a humiliating place of affliction so that we might reflect upon God’s glory, power and goodness, and call upon him for deliverance, help and strength. God brings us down so that we might be brought up to him. As James teaches Christians how to frame their minds and perspectives in this life (James 4:7-10):

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

THE LORD DOES NOT FORGET HIS PEOPLE - 16:21-31

Two important truths about our God for us to remember daily: (1) He never lies to us- -he always keeps His Word. So stay focused on His Word, what He has done for you, and what He says He will do for you- -trust him no matter what; and (2) God has given you the power and grace to overcome your sin, the world, the flesh and the devil (1 John 2:14-16).

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD’S POWER AND GRACE – The Church’s Life in and Through Death

Samson is blinded and bound in bronze shackles- -but his hair began to grow as he served the lords of the Philistines (vv. 21-22). Here is the evidence of God’s covenant promises being kept; here is evidence of God’s keeping his word to his people; here is evidence of God’s great power to succeed and accomplish His will with or without his people’s cooperation: Samson’s hair begins to grow again!

Here we see the triumph of grace in one line: ***“But the hair of his head began to grow against after it had been shaved...”***

We should remember that the hair that Samson had symbolized the strength of the LORD; the hair wasn't the source of Samson's strength, just a symbol of the strength of the LORD and His Spirit. The SOURCE of Samson's strength was God's Spirit (Zech. 4:6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by MY SPIRIT says the LORD").

We are told in verse 22 that God is still in charge and that unbeknownst to the Philistines and their evil power, God will raise up his warrior victoriously again- -although how the mighty have fallen here! We must remember what God had said to Samson's parents: "...the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death" (13:7). Nothing can frustrate God's purposes- -nothing can prevent God from fulfilling his promises. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

***"If we are faithless, he remains faithful- -for he cannot deny himself."
– 2 Timothy 2:13***

Samson had violated his Nazirite vow and in doing so had violated God and His Word. Yet God was to keep His vow to Samson and to Israel- -God was to keep his vows and promises to those who believe!

We are left with a bit of a spiritual "cliff hanger" so that we might ponder God's power and might. If God's people were left to themselves, their own power and strength, then they would be as mere slaves serving the enemy.

Although Israel and Samson struggled with remembering their LORD and His gospel to them as we have learned, here we see the great hope that God has not forgotten his gospel to his people. Samson will be strengthened and rise! But how? How will the bronze shackles be broken?

We'll have to wait to find out...change of scene!

A Pagan Worship Service and Fellowship that Should Make the Church Blush!

In response to the victory of the lords of the Philistines that they believe they have been granted by Dagon, they gather together for pagan worship and revelry. The lords gather to worship Dagon their great and mighty idol because ***"Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand"*** they say (vv. 23-24).

The lords, those that are the leaders and important officials of Philistia are there at this pagan worship occasion. Samson has been notorious for killing Philistines, there has been a great price on his head because he has killed many of their people (v. 24), and now he has been captured- -everyone, especially the important folks are here for this gala event!

"GLORY TO DAGON!" "GLORY TO DAGON" they cry! Dagon as we have learned in previous studies was the principal deity of the Philistines and he was worshipped in Gaza and Ashdod (cf. 1 Samuel 5:2ff). Dagon in historical scholarship was considered to look like a fish because his name in Hebrew *dag* which means "fish"; the truth is that he was

the god of corn and grain because of Hebrew *dagan* which means corn and grain (which is what I have pointed out). It is probably that the word that the ancient Near Eastern people used for corn and grain came from the god rather than the god receiving his name from them (see ISBE: International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, “Dagon”). In some ancient texts, Dagon is considered to be the father of Baal and later identified in Babylonian texts by the name of “Bel”.

We should note that the worship and sincerity of the pagans would make Israel blush at this time in redemptive-history. In fact, the last worship and praise song that was sung after a great victory in Israel was by Samson. This praise and worship song of victory was focused on Samson’s might and power, not God’s (15:16)!

The Philistines worship and praise the wrong God, but they do glorify him as Israel should be glorifying God through obedience and praise for all of his deliverances! We should also remember here that it is not the power of Dagon that has defeated Samson and Israel at this point- **-it is God’s absence** (God had left Samson as helpless for chastisement and temporal punishment, 16:20).

It was not Dagon’s power, but YHWH’s absence that had allowed Dagon and the Philistines this perceived victory- -even here in Samson’s slavery God is revealed as sovereign and powerful!

At these pagan praise services or pagan revelries the wine would flow and every kind of debauchery and abomination imaginable could happen. At this particular event, after the people are buzzed from lots of drink, they’re stirred up in a frenzy, and need some entertainment.

After they have partaken in much wine and revelry, rejoicing in Dagon, they summon Samson to entertain them like a circus clown- -or a court jester. Like a freak show at the carnival, you can hear the Philistine ring leader say: “Step right this way, folks! See for yourself things that will amaze you! Behold, here is Samson the man with no eyes, the man with great strength who will show to you feats of amazement and skill!”

The people say when their hearts are merry: “Call Samson, that he may entertain us” (v. 25- literally they want to “make sport of” Samson). The pagans want to make sport of Samson. It’s not enough for him to be blind now, imprisoned and enslaved, now he must entertain for the evil folks.

This shows the height of arrogance and folly. The people are not satisfied with Samson’s imprisonment; they now want to humiliate God’s Anointed One at this point in redemptive-history. It’s not enough to defeat him; it’s not enough for them to just kill him and take him out of his misery; what is enough is for their cruel and sinful appetites to get full revenge on this man who is God’s chosen one.

Why the Philistines did not notice that Samson’s hair began to grow back we are not told. We can assume that God had sent them a delusion of some sort. We know from other

Scriptures, and especially from New Testament revelation that God can send a delusion to those who worship idols and are engaged in anti-Christ activities so that they will believe a lie as part of their judgment for sin (cf. Isaiah 41:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:11).

ESV 2 Thessalonians 2:8-11: And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false...

God is still seeking an opportunity to destroy the Philistines (14:4) and God in His sovereign power and grace can prevent those who see from not seeing- -especially when they are in the midst of their revelry, drunkenness and cruel treatment of Samson.

The irony of this that the author communicates is that the Philistines have taken Samson's eyes, his vision, his sight, but God has also blinded them from seeing the truth of what is happening. What we will see in our passage is that in the Philistines' sight they are blind to God vindicating himself in power and victory over them, while Samson in his blindness comes to see!

They call upon Samson to entertain them so that they can laugh and make sport of the one with blood-stained cheeks- -but God is allowing them to do this in His Sovereign and Providential direction so that God will defeat His and Israel's enemies!

Even here God is in control. When we seek the illusion of the wicked prospering in this world, gaining a strong foothold in our culture where they are allowed to worship and serve demons rather than the True and Living God, let us remember that God is sovereign and has allowed this for his own glory and the good of His people- -we have to wait upon the LORD to fully understand, but we can trust God at His Word.

We must step back and wonder at God's ways and how he accomplishes them even through evil men and circumstances. We should be reminded of Joseph and how his brothers sold him into slavery and we are told after God had made him Prime Minister of Egypt and exalted him through his low estate:

ESV Genesis 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

We should remember how God through evil men allowed His Beloved Son to be offered up and crucified for our sins:

ESV Acts 4:26-28: The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed¹ - ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod

and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

So the lords of the Philistines call Samson and make him entertain the hosts and he stood between the pillars.

The place where there was worship and revelry was symbolic of the Philistine underworld or place of the dead. Samson has spiritually “descended into hell.”

Samson asks a young man to help him to feel the pillars upon which the house rests so that he can lean during the pagan festival (vv. 26-27). What did this place of worship and praise festival look like?

There are a number of ancient sites of heathen temples that have been discovered within the last 30 or so years. The temple described here at Gaza would follow a similar pattern to the others in the ancient world. It is likely then that the officials (lords) and dignitaries were in a covered portion looking out upon a courtyard where Samson was made a spectacle.

The lords and dignitaries would have been separated from the courtyard by a series of wooden pillars set on stone bases. These stone bases would have supported the roof. On the roof the huge crowd of thousands of Philistines gathered. If many on the roof had come forward to the edge to see Samson’s entertaining spectacle, it is possible that the whole structure might have become unstable- -and perhaps Samson knew this?!

“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” (16:27).

After Samson entertained, they made him stand between the pillars (v. 25b). In standing between the pillars, Samson had been brought closer to the lords and dignitaries who stood under the covered portion.

The Church Calls Upon YHWH!

One last chance of calling upon the Name of YHWH? Israel through Samson calls upon the Name of the LORD- -again (see 15:18-19). ***It takes blindness and bondage to make Samson see- -that’s the irony, but that is sometimes how our Great God and Savior works.***

You will recall in the ministry of Jesus Christ how numerous times he says I haven’t come to call those who can see, but those who admit their blindness- -their helplessness. ***Jesus didn’t come to save those who were NOT SICK and those who were NOT ENSLAVED*** (I wanted to say it in the negative rather difficultly to stress what Jesus offers and to whom). Rather, Jesus came to save the sick, the lost, the enslaved- -one had to understand his or her helplessness so that grace would triumph!

In Samson's blindness the eyes of his heart are illumined so that he sees God (Eph. 3:16-17); in Samson's weakness God makes Samson strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Samson calls upon the Name of the LORD and asks for one more chance to be strengthened; one more chance to defeat the Philistines and to fulfill his calling.

ESV Judges 16:28 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."

At the last moment, in the last seconds of Samson's life, in the bottom of the ninth, in the 11th hour—Samson asks NOT for what he deserves for his behavior- -but Samson asks for God to shed his grace upon him! Samson remembers to call upon YHWH:

Psalm 50:15: "...Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Samson cries to God: "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" (v. 28).

Psalm 40:12-17: For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me. ¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! ¹⁴ Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt! ¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!" ¹⁶ But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!" ¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!

I'm not sure how biblical and sanctified and selfless Samson's prayer is. I'm not trying to be mean, and I know that I can't pray that selflessly either, but it seems Samson is still a bit too focused on himself. Samson mentions NOT the victory for God's glory or that God's honor has been offended (as he should!). Rather, Samson says "that I may be avenged on the Philistines for MY two eyes" (v. 28).

Yet God is good, and God loves His children, and God has promised His people that He would begin to deliver them from the Philistines- -and so God answer Samson's cry for help. This is an excellent example of all of our prayers of how they are mixed with humility and trust in God, while being mixed with our impure motives and sinful desires. Yet Samson like we have a Mediator before the Father, Christ Jesus the Righteous One- -He tells us to boldly come to the throne room through Him and find grace and help in our time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

We want to fully understand here that it is the faithless, foolish and fallen Samson (Davis, pg. 189) who is heard by YHWH. God hears the cry of a man who has been less than

faithful, a man who has acted foolish many times, and who has now fallen under the severe consequences for his sins.

**BUT GOD DOES NOT ABANDON HIM TO SHEOL- -GOD DOES NOT
ABANDON HIM FOREVER!**

God hears the cry of one who does not deserve anything from God. God would have been righteous and holy to say: “No, Samson you have been disobedient and you will now get only what you deserve!” God could have said: “No, Samson, you’re too selfish and self-centered- -I’ll do no such of a thing for you!”

But God is merciful; this is the God who when we were yet sinners, enemies of God, at enmity against God, in our own faithlessness, folly and fallenness dies for us in Christ. This is the God who in our faithlessness, folly and fallenness grants us the faith we need as a gift of regeneration; this is the God who takes the foolish and makes them wise and takes the fallen and the dead in trespasses and sins and makes them alive while yet dead (Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Cor. 1:24ff).

**BEHOLD YOUR POWERFUL, YET GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL GOD WHO
TRIUMPHS OVER OUR SINS!**

This passage and story is given to Israel and to the church to be reminded that no matter how desperate our situation, if God’s people will call upon the Name of the LORD- - no matter how dark and hopeless the situation seems - - He will answer- -God will grant salvation to the repentant who call upon his Name!!

Of course the self-righteous do not like this kind of talk- -Pharisees and Sadducees beware of God’s true revelation of himself in this passage to the faithless, foolish and fallen man. But we must understand again that our salvation is by grace alone! However, there are those who don’t want to believe that salvation is by grace alone if that means that salvation is for the sick, the ailing, the lame, the unrighteous, and the blind. Dr. Davis comments on this trend clearly:

“Someone will argue that Israel-like Samson- does not deserve Yahweh’s help. So what else is new? Those who marshal such objections are frequently those who have little sense of their own depravity. And what of the Christian who has stupidly and miserably failed his Lord? Should he not find hope in seeing that being cast down does not mean being cast off? Should he not rejoice that he can call on Yahweh even from Dagon’s temple?” (Davis, pg. 190).

Samson has been called by Milton “mirror of our fickle state” and by others as an “embodied paradox” (Fausset, pg. 245). I reckon it’s sometimes hard to know what to do with Samson sometimes.

If you think that Samson is a strange person for God to call and use to achieve his purposes then perhaps you need to reflect and meditate on your own sinfulness. If you

don't see yourself in Samson, then you might perhaps should be commended, but methinks that probably you think of yourself more higher than you ought.

If we don't see ourselves in Samson, a little bit faithful and a whole lot unfaithful before God, then we might say with the Pharisee: ***“God, I thank you that I’m not like other men, etc...”***

But if we see ourselves in the mirror, and see Samson as the mirror that he was called to be to Israel and to the Church, then I think we would bow our heads down and say with the tax collector: ***“Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner”*** (Luke 18:11-13).

The Church's Life in and Through Death

And Samson said to God as he called upon His Savior and Deliverer: “Let me die with the Philistines” and he bowed his body and with all his strength he pushed the pillars and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in “Beth-Dagon”, or the “House of Dagon” (vv. 29-30).

Thousands of Philistines die and God's power and grace triumphs over them! This time there is no misunderstanding in anyone's mind that it is YHWH who has brought about this EXODUS from the Philistines through the death of God's Judge-Deliverer-Savior.

And so God had the last word; God's people would have the last words- -and praise and worship of the True and Living God! Now the people of God could say: **“Our God has given our enemy the Philistines into our hand!!”**

The Serpent's head has been crushed- -at least partially and typologically at this point in redemptive-history. Many of the Philistines who had been partying on the roof would have fallen and died; many of the lords and dignitaries below under the covering would have been crushed by people and heavy stone.

It should be remembered that the imagery of heads being crushed has been a common redemptive-historical stand in the Book of Judges; Jael had crushed Sisera's head and a woman crushed Abimelech's head.

^{ESV} Judges 5:26 [Jael] sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple...

^{ESV} Judges 9:53 And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

Samson through his death crushed many of the heads of the Philistines! Samson had begun to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines!! (cf. 13:5). Samson did this not entirely and thoroughly by faith, but because God had sought an opportunity through Samson to show forth His glory, power and grace in the defeat of His enemies (14:4).

This was a great victory for the True and Living God over Dagon. Dagon the false god and image of Satan himself was later in redemptive-history destroyed again and bowed down to the throne of God:

ESV 1 Samuel 5:1-5: When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. ³ And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. ⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

The Apostle Paul tells the people of God more specifically in the fullness of the times that false gods or idols are not gods at all but rather demons:

ESV 1 Corinthians 10:20-21: No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Through Samson's death, God had not merely struck and defeated the Philistines, but more importantly God had struck a hard blow to Satan's kingdom, and had driven the demons out from this place of idolatry. This was to prefigure the day spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah, when all of the proud, all idolaters and their idols will be destroyed by God:

ESV Isaiah 2:11-22: The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. ¹² For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up - and it shall be brought low; ¹³ against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; ¹⁴ against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; ¹⁵ against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; ¹⁶ against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. ¹⁷ And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. ¹⁸ And the idols shall utterly pass away. ¹⁹ And people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, ¹ from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. ²⁰ In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, ²¹ to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. ²² Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

Samson had died in his defeat of the Philistines- -and by God's grace (whether or not Samson did it fully for God or not)- -Samson was a conqueror, an overcomer, and defeated God's and Israel's enemies; this was all because of God's grace and help to him in the last moments.

Samson calls on the LORD at the end of the life that had some successes but could be summarized as a failure in many ways (at least a failure to keep his eyes on the LORD).

Like one of the thieves on the cross at the end of his life who finds paradise in death, so Samson finds hope and paradise at death in God too! It is important to note that Samson did not commit suicide.

Rather, Samson committed himself to the God who could have saved him from death if that were his will. Samson knew he had to take the risk of being injured or killed in order to fulfill God's call to him at the last moment, but he did not kill himself as defined by the term "suicide".

We know that later in the fullness of the times, the One greater than Moses and Samson, cried out to the Lord to be delivered from death- -and he was- -but he first had to lay down his life to die in order that his people would be saved, and his enemies defeated:

Hebrews 5:7-9: In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...

Blind, defeated and humiliated, like a mere clown or court jester to entertain God's enemies, in the Temple of Dagon, Samson calls upon the LORD and the LORD hears him.

In Samson's humiliation and death, there is life. The strength which Samson had lost because of his sin is regained by prayer (Fausset, pg. 261).

Even in death, even captured and blinded in Dagon's temple, God is determined to deliver his people from evil! Samson has "gone down" many times only to find trouble with sin. As Samson goes down to the very pit of hell in Dagon's temple, God delivers his people through Samson.

In our failures, in our desperation, let us remember to call upon the Name of the LORD knowing that he will deliver us. No matter how far we are from God, no matter how much we have displeased him and even wasted much of our lives, God will deliver us as we call upon the Name of the LORD.

But we must seek the LORD while he may be found! (Isaiah 55:6ff).

It is never too late to trust in the LORD!

Is it ever too late? Is there anything our God cannot do?!

Christian: No matter how far you have strayed from God; no matter if you have strayed as far as the faraway place to eat and feed unclean pigs as the “prodigal son” or if you have strayed as far as the older brother’s sinful heart. If you have literally strayed, or your heart has strayed from God and grown cold, there is a way back through repentance when you realize God will still deliver you in order for you to glorify him (Psalm 50:15).

If you are at a distance from God because of your sins, if you have lost the joy of your salvation (see Psalm 51), and sometimes do not even want to serve him any longer; if you have lost your assurance and hope of eternal life and you are under some kind of chastisement- **-then understand that the way back from under chastisement and the affliction of the LORD is through prayer!**

Call upon God NOW- -he will hear you and restore the joy of your salvation; he will heal the bones he has broken (Psa. 51).

There is a way back to God for those who believe and call out to him even if you have sank down as deeply as Dagon’s Temple. Even from Dagon’s Temple God will hear your cries for power, grace and mercy on your behalf!

ESV Jeremiah 3:12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, "' Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever.

ESV Jeremiah 3:14 Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

ESV Jeremiah 3:22 "Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness." "Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God.

And God forbid, even if you have lost your eyes, you can be encouraged that it is better to lose one or both of your eyes than to forfeit the Kingdom and to be cast body and soul into hell- -but return!

ESV Mark 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell...

Even when the armies of Hell are encamped around you, even when the cows of Bashan surround you, God is near to Him who calls out to him- -and he will deliver him. Samson cried out as deliverer as the Psalmist would later cry- -as Jesus Christ of Nazareth would later cry out to God:

Psalm 22:6-8, 12-21: But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; ¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet ¹⁷ - ¹⁷ I can count all my bones- they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. ¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! ²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! ²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

And God heard Him- -and raised Jesus from the dead!

Our helplessness is a door to God's grace! As John Owen wrote:

"Behold, the Lord Christ, that has all fullness of grace in his heart (John 1:16), all fullness of power in his hand (Matt. 28:18), he is able to slay all your enemies. There is sufficient provision in him for your relief and assistance. Jesus can take your drooping, dying soul and make you more than a conqueror" (Rom. 8:37).

In fact, through the death of Samson, God brought life to God's people by delivering them from the Egyptian-Philistines who oppressed them! God through Samson and by Samson's death saved and delivered Israel as he was called to do (13:6).

Samson was "stricken, smitten and afflicted" as a result or as a consequence for his sin against God, his blindness and his forgetfulness of God's call and mission on his life. Contrary to the LORD JESUS Christ who was stricken, smitten and afflicted for our sins as God's elect, Samson's sins were because of his own sins.

Samson was stricken, smitten by God and afflicted *for his own sins*. That is, Samson's sins of his eyes became his permanent affliction and temporal judgment from God.

Jesus Christ was stricken, smitten by God and afflicted *for our sins* (and Samson's!). Jesus took God's eternal wrath upon himself so that we might have eyes to see and might be heirs of all God has granted to us in Jesus.

Jesus was taken prisoner under the power of Satan and his minions so that his people might know and realize their adoption as sons- -as children. Jesus was enslaved and tormented so that we might be fully delivered, saved and joyful in Christ!

Through the LORD Jesus Christ, God also triumphed by His power and grace. His Beloved Son laid down his life too so that His Church might be delivered not merely from the Philistines but from death, hell and the devil.

Jesus like Samson willingly laid down his life for his people. Jesus like Samson conquered the Church's enemies through death:

ESV Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Jesus called out, surrounded by his enemies to be delivered- -he died- -and was taken to the tomb, and on the third day he rose victoriously from the dead! God's power and grace triumphed in Jesus Christ!!!

Samson's brothers took his body and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Samson judged Israel for twenty years (v. 31). God's enemies did not get Samson's body, but he was buried with his family as a picture of the eschatological reunion that would happen in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Like Jesus, Samson's body was not taken by God's enemies, but by his family and friends.

Samson was like Christ in that he triumphed through humiliation, suffering, strength in weakness and found sight by faith in the midst of pain and agony.

Samson was like Israel in that he cared too much for the things of this world. His eyes were too easily fixed on worldly pleasure and women. Samson was self-centered rather than Kingdom-centered. Samson like Israel did what was right in his own eyes and when he did so, he did evil in the eyes of YHWH!

ESV Genesis 49:16-19: "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. ¹⁸ I wait for your salvation, O LORD. ¹⁹ "Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels.

By God's grace in both Samson's and more so in Jesus' life, God's power and grace triumphs over the forces and spiritual powers of wickedness in the Heavenly Realms. Tragedy become comedy in an ultimate sense at the cross. At the cross, God takes the Serpent's comedy of killing the Son of God and makes it a terrible tragedy for the powers of darkness: death, hell and the devil himself!

As Samson shook the powers of hell itself in his death, so Jesus through His death shook the cosmic powers and the foundation of the kingdom of darkness- -and brought resurrection life to those dead! Jesus on the cross had overcome not merely the Philistines but the one who had the power of death, and hell forever (Heb. 2:14-18):

ESV Hebrews 2:14-15: Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who

has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised... - Matthew 27:51-52

God also takes His Beloved Son's tragedy and makes it a divine comedy in His resurrection from the dead, his ascension and glory-enthronement at God's right hand; where Jesus rules and reigns over heaven and earth as King of kings and Lord of lords!

The church must avoid worship of any idols, that is anything that keeps us from obedience to the LORD for what he has done.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that the gods of this world are no gods at all, but actually demons (1 Cor. 8:4ff). Like Samson, the church must remember it is the Bride of Christ and therefore there should be no spiritual adultery or the marrying of foreign un-Christian women and becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers.

The Apostle Paul calls this joining our bodies to a harlot (1 Cor. 6:12-20). Therefore since we have been bought with a price, we ought to offer our bodies to God because we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

All the people of God should know that when we suffer for doing wrong in a covenantal context, YHWH is faithful and will chastise us as sons (Heb. 12:7ff). Samson endured chastening and was brought to repentance, but the people had to wait until the light of NT revelation made this clear.

The church is called to be a holy and consecrated people to the LORD; we must remember our identity as we be not conformed to the mold of this age, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we might do the will of God and fulfill the commands of God by the Spirit living within us (Rom 12:1ff).

Now, the Apostle Paul teaches the people of God to stand in the power of YHWH and of his might, and to resist the devil and his forces of evil (Eph. 6:10ff). Like Samson, because we are united to Jesus Christ can also stand confident in the power and grace of the LORD each day!

We can know as Christ's Church that every stand for obedience to God and the Gospel is a great strike against Satan's kingdom. Satan has been bound (Rev. 12; 20), the strong man has been tied up through Christ's death and resurrection, but we must now fight and wage war spiritually against rulers, authorities and cosmic powers through prayer and gospel proclamation.

***^{ESV} Ephesians 6:10-12: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,***

against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

ESV 2 Corinthians 10:3-4: For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Perhaps the Apostle Paul also had Samson's story in mind when he wrote:

ESV 1 Corinthians 16:13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

CRB

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