

25 March 2004
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

Shadows of our Saviour
“Samson – Destroying the Stronghold”
Text: Judges 13-16; Matthew 12:22-29

The “Shadow of our Saviour” that we are considering tonight is perhaps one of the most unlikely of all: Samson. Because overall, Samson’s a pretty crude guy. He’s kind of unruly. He’s the kind of child a parent has trouble controlling, and who does things his parents wished he wouldn’t do. . . . Yet despite of all that, God uses Samson to be one of His judges, or rulers, and to deliver His people from the hand of their enemies, the Philistines. So let’s take a look at Samson’s life a little bit, and see not only who he is, but also the similarities between his life and our Saviour’s.

And so first, when we are introduced to Samson, it is before he was even born. For the angel of the Lord comes to his parents and tells them that they are about to have a son, which was significant because up to this time, Samson’s mother was sterile and childless. Samson was to be a miracle child and a gift from God. But not only that, the angel of the Lord tells Samson’s parents that this child of theirs is to belong to God and be dedicated to God, because he was chosen by God to deliver Israel from the Philistines. . . . And we see already that Samson’s birth is much like Jesus in his birth – an angel, a first born son, a miraculous birth, and dedicated to God to be a deliverer.

And so Samson grows up, and as I said before, was kind of a rough and tumble guy, who quickly becomes known for his incredible strength. His strength which is a gift from God. And among the stories we are told about Samson and his strength as he is growing up is that one day, as he and his parents were walking to a town named Timnah, a young lion attacks them. But the strength of Samson enables him to not only defeat the attacking lion, but to tear it apart with his bare hands. Completely destroying it! . . . And isn’t it interesting that even here we can see a similarity to Jesus, for Jesus’ enemy, the devil, is described in First Peter as **“a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”** And yet, as we know, he could not devour Jesus.

But eventually, Samson marries a woman named Delilah, who was most probably a Philistine – one of Israel’s enemies. And she betrays him. The rulers of the Philistines offer to make her a very rich woman and pay her a great amount of silver, if she can discover the source of Samson’s strength for them. So that they can overcome him and

subdue him, because his great strength is too much for them. And so Delilah tries. But Samson, instead of simply telling her no, that he will not tell her – instead plays along with her. Not telling her the truth, but misleading her three times . . . until finally she is able to convince him to tell her the truth. (And this, by the way, is a good lesson for you and me, if we are ever tempted to flirt with sin. Because if you play with fire, you're going to get burned!) And Samson was. For after finally telling Delilah the truth, that he would lose his great strength from God if his hair were cut, she cuts his hair that night. And indeed, the strength of God leaves him, and when the Philistines come upon him, they are able to subdue him and capture him – not only binding him in shackles, but also gouging out his eyes. And they took him away as their prisoner.

And again, here we see that what happened to Samson is similar to what happened to Jesus, for Jesus, too, was betrayed by someone very close to him. Betrayed for some silver. Betrayed, and then arrested and taken away by his enemies.

But that was not the end for Samson. For as we heard, after he was captured, his enemies began to celebrate. To celebrate that they had overcome Samson and had won the victory. And they brought Samson out to perform for them, so they could make fun of him. . . . But they had not won, as they were soon to find out! For Samson gets a servant to guide him to a position between the two main pillars in the temple of the Philistines, where they were celebrating. This temple was the temple of their god, named Dagon. And Samson prays to God. A prayer of repentance and a prayer of faith, praying that God would use him just one more time. Use him to destroy not only the Philistines, but also to destroy the temple and the glory of this false god. And that's exactly what happens! God gives Samson back his great strength this one last time – and it is not the Philistine god Dagon who is victorious, but the God of Samson! The God of Israel. The only true God, who brings Samson back from being as good as dead, to defeat Dagon and the Philistines.

And this is where Samson is truly the “Shadow of our Saviour.” For after Jesus was betrayed by Judas for some silver, and arrested and taken away, He too looked defeated. His enemies, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin, saw to it that He was crucified. And they were happy that He was finally out of the way. . . . But just as Samson's capture was not the end of the story, so Jesus' crucifixion was not the end of the story! For Jesus then rose from the dead, and the first stop of His resurrected life . . . *was the temple of the false god of this world*, the stronghold of Satan, hell itself. Jesus descended into hell, and like Samson, showed who the true God is; who the real victor is; and He destroys the gates of hell. He destroys the stronghold.

And that's what we confess, as we will again in just a moment, when we speak the words of the Apostles' Creed. When we say that Jesus "**descended into hell.**" He did not descend to suffer, or to be punished, or to finish His work of redemption – that was already completed, when Jesus said from the cross, "***It is finished.***" No, His descent was to proclaim His victory. And to do it as the God-man. For Jesus did not just descend in His divinity – that would really be no big deal because God can do whatever He wants! But He descends also in His humanity; to destroy Satan and his stronghold as a man. That just as in the one man, Adam, all die[d], so also in the one man, Jesus Christ, shall all be made alive.

And that's what the Gospel reading from St. Matthew was alluding to, when Jesus was teaching the people about the "***strong man.***" Samson, the "Shadow of our Saviour" was indeed a very strong man, but it is Jesus who is the real "***strong man!***" The real strong man who defeated the satanic lion! Who has destroyed His stronghold and destroyed the gates of hell! So that you and I have nothing to fear. Nothing to fear *on* this earth, and nothing to fear from *under* this earth! . . . And it is important to know that. That all our Saviour did was for our forgiveness, life, and salvation. He was crucified for our transgressions, and He was raised for our justification – but don't stop there! He also descended into hell to bind our enemy; to crush him, that we need not fear him. That we may know that he cannot harm us, and that he has no power over us. For he has been defeated. The strong man has won.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Word of God, From Days of Old
Tune: Rockingham Old (HS #853)

4. Samson

The Word of God from days of old
The story of our Saviour told;
That in our sin and misery
Our hope and life our faith might see.

For Judah's lion wins the strife
And reigns o'er death to give us life.
Like Samson, Christ great strength employed,

And conquered hell, its gates destroyed.

For though the world, with strength and might,
And sin and hell against us fight;
The stronger man did intercede,
To rescue us from ev'ry need.

Poor though I be, despised, forgot,
Yet God, my God, forgets me not;
And he is safe and must succeed
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead.

To Thee, eternal Three in One,
Let homage meet by all be done
Whom by the cross Thou dost restore,
Preserve, and govern evermore.