

Judges 16:22-31. But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. ²³ Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands." ²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying, "Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain." ²⁵ While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, ²⁶ Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." ²⁷ Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. ²⁸ Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, ³⁰ Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived. ³¹ Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

The LORD remembers his people.

- 1. Even when we forget him.***
- 2. When we need him the most.***

It is one of those memorable sayings of Jesus that sounds a bit difficult, a bit confusing, or even a bit backwards. At the very least this statement seems to be a paradox that was constructed by our Savior in order to make us stop and think. ***²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*** It is a phrase that could very well sound lofty and abstract to the ear, but it suddenly becomes very real and practical when we see this lesson applied to real life. This saying of Jesus is a powerful truth right now for Christians in places like Syria and other spots in the Middle East. Their lives are threatened, but they are gladly willing to risk their life because through faith their life is now found in Christ.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Jesus' words of warning also form a rather accurate picture of Samson. These words quickly go from an abstract concept or philosophy to concrete truth as we see a similar lesson warning taught to us through this imperfect life and memorable death of this mighty judge, Samson.

²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. In between those two pillars, moments before his death, Samson had finally found his life. After years of losing his life, here Samson was at his best. Again you might think that to be backwards. Samson had lived a legendary life. He had defeated armies and animals with his own bare hands. He had lived a life of love and romance, power and passion; but for what? What did that all mean as he stood there before those who mocked him and his former glory. The personal glory that he was once so proud of was all too temporary when his trust was poorly placed and then that razor cut through his famous hair. Once mighty in power and feared by many, he was now a laughing stock. Samson was now a blind joke of a man surrounded by his enemies in the temple of their false god. Samson, the one that could slay thousands with nothing but a jawbone in his hand was so weak and frail that he was now guided by the hand by a servant boy.

But it was here in this humility that Samson truly found his life once more. Stripped of his power and his fame, as well as his hair and his sight and his sinful arrogance, he was now able to see what was truly important. In his death he would find his purpose. Between these pillars was a man who humbly wanted vengeance for his eyes and wanted to serve his Lord with one last act of devotion to the glory of the one true God. As more than one commentator noted, *"Samson would die much better than he lived."*

Why was that? What happened in his life? How did he get to such a low place? We remember that Samson had been dedicated from birth into service to the Lord. He had been set apart by God and had taken the vow of the Nazirite. But he struggled to serve the LORD with all his strength and with all his soul and with all his might. Instead his life reflected one poor choice after another, because his life reflected a desire to serve himself and follow his own desires. His strength, his success, his notoriety, and fame - all blessings from God - were now all a part of his problem because he loved and paid attention to those things more than he paid attention to and praised his God. Because things were so easy for Samson his own personal power and influence went to his head and he often served himself instead of serving the LORD. He was selfish is how he acted. He put his own feelings and his desires before what God commanded. He was not faithful to the vow and the promises that he made to the LORD, instead many times he simply did what he wanted to do. Among his faults: he was quick to seek revenge rather than the council of the LORD; he let his love for women cloud his judgment, he arrogantly toyed with the enemy

and trusted his own strength rather than in his God who gave him strength.

At one point it surely appeared that Samson had everything in the world that he could want. He had strength, fame, power, leadership, and love; yet all the while he was losing his soul. But the God of grace allowed Samson to be humbled. Therefore, in those last moments of his life Samson was led to repentance, and was compelled to serve his LORD. No longer was he engrossed in a life of self service that led nowhere, but now he had a purpose to fulfill. In losing his life for the LORD he had found his life. And so in faith Samson denied himself. He did not plead for God to release him, but he willingly accepted and took up his cross of suffering, and followed and served his Lord once more. In sincere faith he called out to the Lord using a title of reverence, he called out to the LORD God, his Sovereign Lord with a simple plea, ***“Remember me!”*** Once again a man of faith, he had in mind the things of God and died in service to his Savior God. He lost his life, but he died in faith.

And so what can we take from the life and death of Samson? Well we must watch out for those trappings of life that we are so common to all of us. We might not be tempted by fame and power and desire on the same level that Samson was, but these are still very much temptations that seek to entice, distract, and drag us away from a life of faith lived for God. There are times that we are led astray by our own sinful desires. Maybe attention and acceptance at the workplace leads us to compromise our faith. Perhaps a sexual attraction leads us to ignore the will of God. The draw of power and influence and wealth may lead us to disobey the commands of God. Pride swells up, God’s blessings and his place in our life is ignored, and we seek to serve ourselves. It can happen to any of us, to even those who appear so strong in the faith. And soon the child of God that was set apart for service to the Lord at baptism becomes the child of this world swimming in temptation and concerned only about the things of this world. The pursuits of pleasure, of a comfortable life, a life of worldly acceptance and importance quickly sneaks up and overtakes us to the point where we may even compromise or ignore or lose our faith all together. Christians be warned! ***Whoever wants to save his life will lose it!***

And so every once in a while the LORD in his love will send us a needed reminder, a wakeup call of sorts, in order that we might not be dragged away or enticed from our faith. Every once in a while the LORD will drop a bible history lesson like this in front of us to remind us of the powerful pull that the things of this world may have on us. Every once in a while the LORD our Savior will have to rebuke us sharply and directly with his word, like he had to do for Peter, when we do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. Or perhaps the LORD will see fit to humble us through some difficulty or hardship so that we once again become aware have to lean on the LORD and not our own strength and power alone. Perhaps our wise and gracious God may even allow us to follow that path of self destruction for a time so that we may finally see the error of our ways and turn to the LORD in his blessed repentance that comes through faith.

Whatever the case may be for you, may we all take heed the warning that our God, and our Savior, Jesus gives us. And may we not only heed this warning but may we revel in the grace of our God here as well. Dear Christian, praise and serve the Lord who remembers his people.

What mercy and grace God showed to his servant Samson! Sinful and selfish decisions, foolish missteps, had brought this mighty man to this low and humble point. Samson had ignored the will of God and had gone down his own arrogant path and this is where it led him, and yet God did not cut ties with or disown his child. He did not leave Samson to rot in his own selfish ways because, "He's getting what he deserved". No, God in his mercy was there to hear his servant's plea. ***"Remember me!"*** The Lord remembered Samson and heard his cry. And in his grace and mercy the Lord granted him a blessed end. Samson died in faith and accomplished his greatest victory in death.

What mercy and grace God shows to his undeserving servants! He remembers his children, even when we forget him. He is there to answer our cries when we need him the most. He gives us the strength to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow in faith. And we do this gladly because we remember our Savior Jesus who was so willing to take up his cross for us. The mighty God of heaven and earth humbled himself to save us. The Lord Jesus was surrounded by those that opposed him, mocked him and jeered him. Even his own friends tried to deter him from his mission of salvation and yet Jesus was resolute in carrying out his plan to save us. Nothing, not the treasures of all the world, not even Satan himself, nor death nor the powers of evil, would deny Jesus. Our Lord, our Savior, would go to ***Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*** Our Lord and Savior Jesus died and rose in our place so that we might be saved from eternal disgrace. In his death and resurrection we have the ultimate victory.

So follow him, deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow him. Serve the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strengths knowing that the LORD remembers you. Dear friends, take heart, **God remembers his people.** He remembers us even when we forget him. He remembers us and strengthens us when we need him the most. May this good news of Jesus be your strength now and always as you live your life to the glory of the LORD God! Amen.