

# A Sketch on Sampson's Life

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer  
September 27, 1959

There will be more here, and there will be more local people present I think too. And I want to talk about why the children of God have failed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the power the Spirit, and why we don't have it. But tonight, I want to address the preachers mainly. And I want to take a text, four chapters from the book of Judges; four whole chapters, but I am not going to read them. I'm going to assume that you have recently. I did recently and had refreshed my mind on some truth I gave years ago about a man by the name of Samson.

Let me read just these verses. The thirteenth chapter of Judges, verses 24 and 25. And the woman bare a son and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

There are parts of the Scriptures that I don't understand, but the very sound of them, the reading of them, blesses me. This is one of them. The Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan. I would have traveled 90 miles to get to the camp of Dan, walking, if I had thought that there was a man there that the Spirit of the Lord was moving at times. Anyway, this man Samson, I just want to give a little survey of his life and apply it to us preachers.

You know, the beautiful thing about the Scriptures, one beautiful thing, they're up to date. They are just as fresh and as new as the latest issue of any daily newspaper. You turn over these old, brown pages that have been printed many years ago, and the stories they tell go back hundreds of years. This particular one goes back, how far, 3000 years.

And yet, you see when you see the characters walking around. You see them on the streets of Chicago. You'll meet them in conferences. You see them at Councils. You see them in Sunday schools. You meet them in churches. You meet these people, they're here. The Spirit of the Lord picked out certain men and gave little vignettes, little thumbnail sketches of their lives, as much as to say, now, get acquainted with these men and you will know everybody else. Get acquainted with these and you'll know yourself.

So, here is a man, and I just want to talk about him, giving a crayon sketch of the man, and see if you can find yourself here, or maybe somebody you know. Or, if you can't find yourself here, you can find a warning here at least so you can escape the trap into which the man fell.

Now this man, Samson, had an origin. He wasn't just an accident. He was born in answer to the prayers of godly parents. And I think of it, it is not an original thing to say that the children of godly parents have a running start on all other children. Children of godly parents may go astray. Samuel's children did. Joshua's children did. They may go astray, but they're not as likely to. And the children of

godly parents have opportunities to be right. And the likelihood that they will be right far surpasses that of any other children born into ungodly homes.

Now, God had a mighty task that he wanted done. And of course, he had to get a mighty man did do it. The man had to be as big as the task or just a little bit bigger than the task. If the task is 10, God doesn't give him a man as much strength as would be 10 and say, here, 10 equals 10, and the job I want done is 10. And now, I'll make the man just that strong. He gives him an over plus. If the power that's needed is 10, God gives him 12. If it's 20, God is likely to give him 25. You have got to have an over, a plus of power.

You remember that when David went to slay Goliath, he took five stones from the brook. And when he had killed Goliath, he still had four left. He could have killed four more giants if they'd have been around. Most of us merely hang on, saved by the bell. We merely have power enough to get us through the last meeting Sunday night, then we go panting off home. But the Word of God shows that God gives man more than he needs.

So, God had to have a man bigger than the job. And so to get him, He went back a generation. And usually, God does go back a generation if he wants a man to do a great job. And that generation, back to which God went, consisted of a good, wise, prayerful and practical mother, and a good, but dull and inferior father.

Now, the lesson we learn from biography, and you'll learn it all the way along, really. You go into the Old Testament where men beget so and so, and so and so beget so and so, and died and slept with his fathers and all the rest. And his mother's name was so and so. Well, you will find almost always, and I don't know that almost needs to be there, that every great man had a great mother. I don't know whether that is 100% true, but it's so near to 100%, that for all practical purposes we may say, that when God wants a great man, he gets a great woman to have that great man and to bring him into the world. You will notice one thing, that no superior person was ever ashamed of his mother. Many a superior person has been ashamed of his father.

But nobody that has been great in the world has ever had a mother he needed to be ashamed of, because mothers you need to be ashamed of don't have sons who would be ashamed of them. That's a terrible thing. You see, you can't decide who your parents will be. And you can't decide what kind of parents you will have. But all you can decide is what kind of a son your parents will have. And that's the part that you need to do. But nevertheless, it is true that the lessons of biography teach us science and history and experience, and the Bible agree to teach that the hope of the world lies with its women.

Now, I want to look a little bit at the greatness of this man and show you that he was a greater man than we imagined that he was. He was a great man, and he wasn't a libertine. Some people put Samson down as a libertine; he was a wicked, vile, sex pervert. He was nothing of the sort. There has never been one time recorded anywhere in the Scriptures, that he did anything off color and that was one time when he went to Gaza and stayed all night when he should have been at home, but he did do that one wicked thing. But apart from that, there is nothing in the Scriptures that shows anything wrong with the man Samson.

Samson never took a wife when he had wife living. She died and then he took on another wife. But outside of the one break, we don't read of anything wrong. He was not a libertine. And then the man judged Israel 20 years. And you can't tell me that a common man could have done that. Israel was too difficult. Israel was an unbroken, wild colt of the desert. And nobody could possibly judge Israel 20 years and be an ordinary man. He had to be a big man. And the man had great faith in God, great faith in God.

And he finally gave all that he had in one last act of heroic devotion to Israel, and prayed, O God, avenge me of my two eyes and deliver Israel, and God delivered Israel. And God put him in the Hall of Fame, the 11th chapter of Hebrews. If you will read the 11th chapter of Hebrews, you'll find Samson alongside of David and Jephthae and many another of the great. God didn't bury ordinary people in His Hall of Fame. And he did put Samson there.

But Samson was not only great, but he was also a great failure. Look at some of the failures of the man. He failed to reach the expectation that his parents had for him. He failed to reach the expectation that God had for him. And he failed to realize the possibility of his own great nature. This is what bothers me, my friends. I see a young man today; I take a walk with Him. As a rule, I don't run around with old men. I don't know why. I go around with young fellows. When I hit a conference or a Council or anywhere, two or three young fellows will be with me. But you'll never see an old man with me. They just don't hang around me. I don't know why exactly, but the young fellows do.

And I will see a young fellow today and five years later, I'll see that young fellow. And I had hope for him. I saw a light in his eyes and a warmth in his smile, and I had expectation for him. And then later when I meet him, I find that he has settled down and gotten married and has two babies and an automobile and television set and a lawn and the lake where he goes to fish and a cabin. And he has made a compromise with the possibilities that lay in his great nature.

There is a man. I'm not going to tell you what part of the world he's in, but he was a friend of mine many years ago. He's about seven years younger than I. We were great friends. He was a great reader and we used to write letters and correspond a lot. I used to get encouraging letters from him and send them to him again; and we were great friends. I saw him come up and up and up and up. And I thought this is going to be an outstanding man. This will be one of our great preachers in this generation. Well, his wife died, and he married a blonde. Now, that was perfectly all right for him to marry again after his wife died. I'm sure that was all right. But he's never amounted to anything since then. I don't know why. Not because she was blonde. I don't mean that. But he was just under her blessed little thumb. And he goes all around under her blessed little thumb. You can't get anywhere but what she tags along. And the fellow, he just ran up against a snag. Now, she's a good woman. She's a pure woman. She's a nice woman. She's a useful woman, but she wasn't any good for him.

What I'm trying to say is that it's possible to fail to realize the possibilities that lie in your nature. Now we're not all the same size. Don't let's imagine that. They tell us if you get filled with the Holy Ghost you'll be like Spurgeon. Don't you let anybody tell you that at all. God made one Spurgeon. And being filled with the Holy Ghost may mean that you will simply be a very godly bookkeeper, that's all. It just

may mean that you will be a wonderful, godly streetcar conductor like our good Brother Eckvol who has now gone to Florida.

It may just mean that you will be a godly person, but not known. You see, God gives to some people five acres, and He gives to some people 500 acres. And for me to tell a man who has five acres built into him, now, if you'll get filled with the Holy Ghost, you'll be as big as the man who has 500 acres is ridiculous. You can't make a Packard or a Cadillac or a Rolls Royce out of a Volkswagen by filling it with gasoline. And you can't make a Spurgeon out of me by filling me with the Spirit.

So don't let us all get all mixed up on this. We ought to be filled with the Spirit if we're never heard of across the street. But this man Sampson had great possibilities. He was a vast man in many ways, but he never realized the possibilities that lay in his vast nature. He failed to live in character with his exalted birth. He was born in answer to prayer. His coming was announced by an angel that leapt on the flaming altar and vanished into fire. That was the way he was announced. But he didn't come up to it. He failed. And he failed to finish his job, to finish his life's work.

You know, Keats, in one of his wonderful little sonnets, talks about when I was going, I had fears that I may cease to be before my pen has gleaned my teaming brain. He had so much in him that he was afraid he would die before he could get it written. Well, he did. He died at 24. They say if he had lived to be 50, he would have been equal to Shakespeare or greater. But he died at 24. His fears came true. He never finished his life's work. Samson never finished his. Samson was the unfinished symphony.

Compare him, if you will, with David, who served his generation by the will of God and then fell on sleep. And as I've said many times, nobody has any right to die until he has served his generation, nobody. And look at our Lord Who said, I finished the work which Thou hast given me to do; and Simeon that said, now Lord, let thy servant depart in peace, mine eyes have seen Thy salvation. And Paul who said, I am now ready to be offered. I have finished my course. I have fought the fight. I've kept the faith.

Those men finished their work before the whistle blew. But God blew the whistle on Samson long before it was time to quit. Samson never did his day's work. And what I'm afraid of is that some listening to me right now, members of this conference, who had a good running start, brought up in a good home, prayed into the world, and then prayed up and then prayed into the Kingdom and then prayed off to school and prayed into the ministry. That like this man, Samson, you will fail to live up to the possibilities that lie in your own nature.

Well, now, this man failed, and I am going to talk a little bit about why he failed. And I'm going to assume that he wouldn't need to have failed. There was no fate that said he should fail. He failed because his failure lay in himself. And I assume that if he had corrected himself, in time, he wouldn't need to fail. Consider some character weaknesses that caused the failure of this man Samson, and then instead of snapping your suspenders and saying, that man Samson, he was a flop, say to God Almighty, O God, do I see in Samson my own picture.

The first thing about the man Samson that I noticed, was that he lacked maturity. He never became an adult. He was a juvenile all of his life. He was as big as a horse and as powerful as 10 horses or 20. But he never quite grew up. Do you remember his silly riddle? Here was a man anointed with the Holy Ghost, and yet he was so silly that he went among the Philistines saying, out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. You know, a riddle maker. And notice how he lied to Delilah. He lay his head on Delilah's lap lying to her. She'd wake him up and say, the Philistines be upon thee and he'd shake it off. That's in the 16th chapter.

Notice when he got mad at the Philistines at one time. He went out like a pouty, little boy and set fire to the foxes' tails and turned them loose into the standing corn of the Philistines. Notice that. And notice how he had an unnatural attachment to his parents. He had a Oedipus complex before the term was invented, because when his wife insisted, tell me the secret Samson. Why, he said, I haven't even told my mother. Should I tell you?

He didn't remember that it says a man shall leave his parents and cleave unto his wife. He had forgotten that. And so he was a mama's boy, a great big hulk. And he never quite grew up. And you know what makes the trouble in districts and in churches, it's people that never grow up. You know, people that weigh 200; they're overweight and all that. They're big enough all right. If you judge them by the suit they wear, you would think they were mature. But judge them by the way they act and you know they're not. This man wasn't. He never was a mature man. I wonder if we can check ourselves against that. What kind of man am I anyhow?

Well, second, he lacked integration. He lacked integrated personality. He had great power, and he had great faith, and he had great loyalty to Israel. And he had a lot of great qualities, but they never hung together. The iron wouldn't mix with the clay. He built with untempered mortar. And he never quite got, if you cut through Samson, you didn't find him the same thing all the way through.

I like people that you can slice them four ways and find them all the same, all the way through. But I find so many of God's people, that if you slice beneath the surface, you'll find something else. If you scratch them even, you'll find something else. They're not what they seem to be. God's people, we should be able to lay them out on the block and cut them four ways and find everything just as it seems to be.

Samson wasn't like that. There was no integration there you see. He was a great man. But he wasn't mixed right. He was lumpy. And His grace wasn't sufficient to support his gifts. I have found men like that considered to be great leaders in the church, and they have big names, but if you get to know them, you'll find that their gifts are far beyond their graces.

There was once a man named Holmes. He was a bishop in India, and he wrote a great book years ago that I got a hold of and got a lot of help from. And he taught this. I don't know where he got his Scripture, but he taught this, and being a bishop, I suppose it's partly true anyhow. He said, the grace of God operates two ways. It operates in a man, and it operates through a man. And he said, the grace of God can operate through a man to bless people and not operate in the man very much at all. Or it can operate in the man and not operate through the man very much.

Here's an illustration of what I mean. Back in the hills of West Virginia where I preached when I was a boy, there had preceded me there, that is, he had come and left his mark and gone and I think had died. But it was fresh in everybody's memory, and they were talking about him. His last name was Smith, and his first name was Syndicate, Syndicate Smith. I don't know where mama got that name, but his name was Syndicate Smith.

Now, here's what he used to do. He used to go into a town, put on a meeting, have an old-fashioned, knockdown and drag out revival meeting, get a lot of people converted, take an offering, and then go get drunk and stay drunk as long as the offering held out. Then when he needed some more money, he'd go to another town and repeat the process. And an old fella who had been converted in his meetings told me about it. I said, did anybody ever stick that got converted? He said, Brother Tozer, I'm one. He said, I went to his meeting prejudiced, determined that I would not have any part of that man. But he said when he gave the invitation something grabbed me and took me to the front, and I got down and repented and got converted and I've been walking with God ever since. He had converts, and those converts stuck.

Paul said, I thank God the gospel is preached no matter how it's preached. Do you remember that? Now the grace of God didn't work in Syndicate Smith. There was too much of a high alcohol content. It couldn't work in him, but it worked through him. You say, you never heard before of God working through a man like that? Well, God worked through Samson, but he couldn't work in Samson. He just worked through Him. And you will find lots of people. When you hear of men that have been used of God and yet you know something is wrong with him, remember that.

The grace of God works in a man or through a man. But it can work in a man and through the man, but it can work through the man without working in the man. And that's why some people came to Jesus and said, Lord, Lord, did not we cast out devils in Thy name. Did not we in Thy name do many miracles? And He would say, I never knew you. Depart from me.

We preachers ought to spend a lot of time disillusioning our parishioners about how holy we are. We ought not to allow them to continue to have the mistaken impression that the average preacher is better than the average layman. It just isn't so.

Father, we pray, that Thou wilt bless us through the Word. We thank Thee for this picture gallery which stood in front of this great big man, Samson. We love him and we pity him. What he might have been and what he was, are such sharp contradictions, and the warning to the centuries. O Lord, if we could never be as strong as he was, let us not be as weak as he was. If we never could be great, we pray Thee, help us that we might reverently cultivate the little plant that we do have. We ask it, in Christ's name. Amen.