

## GOD ANSWERED SAMSON'S PRAYER

Judges 16:1-31

"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." (16:28)

The story of Samson fascinates many people because the story is dramatic with a big twist at the end. People tend to focus their attention on Samson. Today I'd like to shift your attention from Samson to God. The title of today's message is 'God answered Samson's prayer', instead of 'The last prayer of Samson', because my message started with one question "What if God did not answer Samson's prayer?" If God had not answered Samson's prayer, Samson's life would have ended in prison, being mocked and humiliated by his enemy. Samson's prayer and even his life became precious because of the mercy of God who answered his prayer. May God bless all of you here today with His grace revealed in this passage!

God chose Samson a Nazirite, set apart to God from his birth. God chose him as a judge who would begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines (13:5). Samson, however, did not live up to this calling and privilege. In the earlier chapters, when Samson traveled, he brought troubles. He did whatever he felt good.

*<sup>1</sup> One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.*

Samson went to Gaza, deep into Philistine territory, not to fight against the enemy, but to spend the night with a prostitute there, with no sign of shame or remorse. He freely indulged in his fleshly desires. He was spotted and surrounded by the people of Gaza who wanted to kill him at dawn, but he got up at midnight and pulled out the humongous doors of the city gate and left the city as if nothing happened.

Was he thinking he was invincible? What he didn't know is his pride was about to get him into deep trouble, and the trouble comes with the famous Delilah. Let's look at verses 4-6.

*<sup>4</sup> Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. <sup>5</sup> The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver." <sup>6</sup> So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."*

The enemy Philistines wanted to use Delilah as a spy. They offered her a deal with a large amount of silver for finding out the secret of Samson's strength. She made persistent efforts to loosen his lips. He was just toying with her at first as if it's just a game (7-15). But she kept insisting until he finally reveal the secret of his power. Let's look at verse 17.

*17 So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man."*

Samson's revealing the secret of his power is not a small matter. As a Nazirite, God's chosen servant, he did not live up to God's calling. He broke all vows as a Nazirite, only except this one, he never used razor on his head. He lived an ungodly life, but he kept this vow anyway. It means Samson at least recognized himself as a Nazirite, just as he said to Delilah in verse 17, "because I have been a Nazirite ...".

His level of understanding of being a Nazirite was probably very shallow, but this is how Samson was connected to God. Observing his life, Samson had no genuine faith in God or deep understanding of his identity. What did I say in the beginning of the message? I want you to shift your attention from Samson's faults and flaws to the grace and mercy of God. God accepted Samson's little effort to keep his hair from a razor and used it as a doorknob to intervene in his life. A merciful God treated Samson more than he deserved.

When Samson revealed his secret, however, God lost the doorknob and Samson became cut off from God. We know what happened to Samson. In verse 20b, God had left Samson. The Philistines captured him, gouged out his eyes, bounded him with chains and made him to grind in the prison (18-21). They wanted to celebrate their victory in a way to humiliate Samson to an intolerable degree. Let's read verses 23-25.

*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,*

Thousands of the Philistines were assembled at the temple. They were giving praise to Dagon their god, obviously with sumptuous foods being served, liquor being consumed, loud music and nasty dancers. They were enjoying the sight of Samson, with still fresh wounds, lifeless eyes, so damaged physically and mentally. It was Samson's eyes that got him into so much trouble. Now his eyes were gouged out. Samson's strength was prostituted for his own purposes and glory, being so proud of his strength, now he was in chains grinding, completely powerless. Samson was finally paying a high price for his sins.

In spite of this, or perhaps because of this, it would seem that Samson now saw things more clearly than he had ever seen them before. When Samson hit rock bottom, he began to think who God really was. Let's read verses 28-30.

*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.*

Samson prayed. Did he ever pray before? For the first time in his life, Samson prayed to the LORD. Samson had forgotten God for a long time, but now he began to remember Him. He asked God, "strengthen me just once more." Samson thought his strength came from his long hair. He believed he could use his strength as if it's his own. He didn't know that God was the true source of his strength. That's why he didn't need to pray. When his eyes were opened, seeing things clearly, he finally recognized God who existed and could give him the strength back even if his hair was cut. In the past, he relied on his own strength, and his own pride. Now he relied on God and His mercy.

God answered Samson's prayer. Samson killed the enemy more when he died than while he lived. God had so many reasons to ignore his prayer. It's too late. This last-minute prayer cannot cover his sins. He was shameless, but God's mercy is fathomless. God answered his prayer. God could kill the Philistines by Himself. He did not need Samson to kill the enemies. Yet a merciful God answered Samson's prayer and used it to accomplish His purpose. It changed Samson's life completely. Samson's end changed from 'lonely death in prison with shame and guilt' to 'honorable death with God's enemies with forgiveness and grace'. I believe this made Samson's name is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a man of faith, not because of his life or prayer, but because of our merciful God who accepted his prayer.

Samson brought great shame on God's name. He totally ignored God's existence and His sovereignty. God in His rightful sovereignty could have killed him long ago. But God was graceful, He bore with Samson's pride and ignorance. God covered his eccentric character and wicked lifestyle with His mercy. It's our merciful God who indeed led Israel and delivered them during the dark times. It's our merciful God who allowed Samson to participate in God's salvation work.

God is merciful to me too. The God of Samson has been with me in my life, especially in my life as a self-supporting missionary in South Africa. I still remembered the day when I came to South Africa in 2004. The weather was great with clean sky and I felt fresh air. I was young, and I had the desire to be a successful missionary in Africa. In reality, I struggled to speak a single phrase in English. I struggled to adapt the life in South Africa with a very different culture. I had to work 6 days a week as a cashier including public holidays. Co-working with difficult people in a new ministry was harsh. I was not well rested in everywhere in the first 2 years at work and even at church. I wanted to give up everything and just disappear.

Samson prayed at last, but I didn't even pray. I just wished things went ok. It's God who opened the door to pioneer Wits ministry. It was on December 2006. Pioneering a new chapter wasn't in my plan and I believed it's for someone who had faith and godly passion. But God raised me as a Wits UBF pioneer not because I was qualified or I wanted, but because to save me from a spiritual downfall because I could have given up everything if things would not turn around.

I vividly remember the first Sunday at Wits. It was in a small cottage living room / kitchen, only audience were Rebekah and Becky in her mother's womb. I knew nothing about what needs to be done for pioneering a new ministry, how to prepare bible

studies or Sunday message, how to find sheep, how to maintain a ministry. I knew absolutely nothing, unprepared and confused, and still angry about the situation.

I was not sure for how long I could maintain the ministry, and even my life as a missionary. A few months later, when my life was spiritually at stake, God sent Lesedi. I still don't know why he came to our Sunday service every week. What I know is the answer is with God, not with me. A young and smart Engineering student in his fourth year had many reasons to find a well-organized church. But he came to us. We had a 1:1 bible study every week, actually he talked mostly. Because of him, I had to prepare a Sunday message every week, and I couldn't run away from the ministry. From the following year, God sent Khomo, Desmond, Donald and Katlego. God grew them as God's servant and they became my old friends in Christ.

In human point of view, our church was not attractive to young varsity students. Our Bible study and Sunday service could be boring to young African people. We did not have a worship team. We did not have a bible house or a fancy church building. We tried many years to have a Sunday service in the campus, but it looked impossible. Who would come to listen to my broken English message!

But God worked. God blessed the ministry more than I deserve. What I could do only was to prepare a Sunday message every week. I wanted to run away from this, but God kept me in the ministry by sending more brothers and sisters. What I did was not that big of a deal as a missionary, but a merciful God used it as a doorknob to intervene in my life. God accepted this little struggle and contribution as my faith and used it precious at Wits ministry.

What I thought it would not be possible back then became reality. We have our own bible house now. We have a Sunday service in the campus now. We have a talented worship team. We have dedicated shepherds and shepherdesses. We have house churches. Whenever I saw Lesedi and Desmond, and the situation that we had literally no sisters in the ministry, I thought to myself establishing house churches were impossible here. But it became reality. In 2019, we could finally have the local leadership. It's the most challenging mission, but God sent Christiaan and Sarah out of nowhere and with Lesedi and Desmond, they formed a beautiful leadership in the ministry.

I don't know how all these happened. I don't know for what reason I'm so much blessed to be part of this beautiful ministry. Now I know God did not need me for all these works to be done. But He chose me and used me although I brought so much trouble because of my faults and flaws. Instead of judging and punishing me, God kept me in the ministry and helped me to live a shepherd and missionary in South Africa since 2004. God made my life so precious.

I came to Indonesia a month ago. To be earnest with you, my heart is not settled yet. I still don't know why God did not open the door for me to come back to South Africa. I tried hard to come back during my staying in Dubai alone for 19 months. But the door was not opened.

For the last 20 years, I tried to settle in South Africa as a missionary and a family man. It wasn't an easy journey, but by God grace alone, I could obtain a permanent resident permit along with a SA ID book and driving license. I could buy a house a few years ago. My heart is in trouble when I think I have to start all these again from the

scratch in Indonesia – maintaining visa, learning the new language, beginning to pioneer a new ministry. But God taught me one thing from my recent bible studies in Genesis. It's about Abraham, his life journey in the promised land. Hebrew 11:9-10 describes it in this way.

*<sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Abraham became a wealthy and powerful man in the area. But he lived in tents, because he knew his home in the promised land was just temporary. He was looking forward to his eternal home in heaven. I believe God sent me to Indonesia for His purpose. I thought I could live in South Africa for 30 or 40 years at least. But I'm in Indonesia now. I believe God has now a different plan in my life here. I don't know how long I will stay in this country. If God asks me to go someplace else in future, I pack again and go where God sends me to. It's not what I want, but I can and I will because my home in South Africa or Indonesia are not my eternal home to stay. The only place I will settle forever is God's kingdom, my eternal home God prepares and waits for me to come when my time has come.

May God help me not to forget God's amazing grace poured out for me in South Africa. In Indonesia, I pray that I may rely on God, trust in Him who will make my life precious again. I honestly pray that your life may be also much blessed in a merciful God! God bless all of you! Amen!