

August 27, 2023

“He Is Not Like Us”
Judges 16:1-31

FCF: Imagining that God is like us.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The LORD is God. He is not like us.
(anchor) This should encourage us.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Every age has its myths. One that has its roots in the early part of the 20th century goes like this, “God is a projection of your wishes.” That is, “You believe He’s real because you want Him to be real.” Of course, that can be a projection in itself but that’s a whole other discussion.

The truth is that Christians can indeed project when it comes to God. We can project our experiences and expectations in life upon Him. That is, we think He’s like us. But is that true?

We’re pressing on in our study in Judges. This is a significant period in Israel’s history, the time between the settlement in the land and the establishment of the monarchy, between Joshua and David. This morning brings us to our third and final look at a man called Samson.

SCRIPTURE READING: Judges 16:1-31**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Imagine this scenario. You’ve been in a toxic environment - a workplace, classroom, or a locker room. But now you’ve left it behind. You’re in a new place, trying to adjust. But you find yourself looking over your shoulder, hesitant to do anything that might upset someone, sure if you do, you’ll be belittled and demoted. But then one of your new compatriots says, “Relax. It’s not like that here. It’s different.” That would be good news. That should encourage you.

It’s like that for the follower of Jesus. For His ways are not like ours. He defies all our expectations and our assumptions. Now that can take some getting used to. And the more we have to unlearn, the longer it may take. But it’s good news. This is very much part of what we see here in Judges 16. The LORD is God. He is not like us. And that should encourage us.

“But how do we see He is not like us in this text?” Good question. In at least three ways. First, with the stern warning. Second, with the deep hope. And then, third, with the great sign.

I. A STERN WARNING

First, the stern warning (**READ Judges 16:1-3**). He has learned nothing. Sticking to your guns and being unteachable are two different things. Samson’s the latter. Hence, the warning.

A) The Larger Pattern

The narrator wants the reader to see themselves in this, to see the larger pattern at work.

1. Samson’s folly

Samson is addicted to love. He’s moving into greater danger. And he’s blind to it. It is his folly.

2. Israel’s folly

This tracks with Israel’s folly. They too were richly gifted, well positioned. But they were given to chasing after every other love they could find. And they were blind to this and the danger.

B) The Deeper Principle

Samson was a picture of and for Israel. Which takes us to the deeper principle in play.

1. The meaning of gifting

Let's think for a moment about the meaning of gifting. This was perhaps Samson's greatest problem. We read of the Spirit of God coming on him, giving him great strength. So much outer strength but so little inward power, such much doing but so little being. How can this be? Partly, this is because of the way the Spirit worked in the OT era. But it goes beyond that. There is still the danger of having the gifts of the Spirit without the fruit. We are warned of this in the NT.

2. The purpose of gifting

Which takes us to the purpose of the gifting. Up until the end, Samson is using his gifting for himself. But that's not the intent. Such gifting is always to be for the building up of others.

Samson's story is meant as a warning for us. It's the "Danger! Bridge Out!" sign.

Illustration:

He is the poster child for wasted potential. Think of the many athletes who show such promise at the collegiate level. But then they turn pro and all goes sideways. They've lost their support system. They run with the wrong crowd, take the wrong advice, ditch the discipline.

Application:

Samson's story is like that - a warning. But to be warned is to be loved. It comes from a place of care. Will we hear it? Think with me. Where might you be presuming and misusing your gifting? Where is there a deficit between your doing and being? How would you know if there was? And how would you address it? Let me suggest that has a good deal to do with your prayer life going beyond arrows to the sky. And having people who can speak into your life.

The LORD is God. He is not like us. He warns us. This should encourage us.

II. A DEEP HOPE

Moving from the stern warning, we then come immediately to the deep hope.

A) God's Enduring Purposes

We see much here in terms of God's enduring purposes, His plans that cannot be shaken.

1. Deviations from the path

Samson takes no few deviations from the path. From the start, he was to be a Nazirite. That meant he was to be dedicated to serving the LORD, expressed in abstaining from strong drink, from contact with dead bodies, from cutting his hair. He managed to break each one of these.

2. Declaration of the plan

But countering Samson's deviation from the path is the LORD's declaration of the plan. The angel declared to his mother ([READ Judges 13:5](#)). Later on, we read ([READ Judges 14:4](#)). The "he" is the LORD. This deliverance would surely come, even if it was to take a circuitous path.

B) God's Abiding Presence

So we see God's enduring purposes. But not just that. We see also His abiding presence.

1. Samson's prayer

This brings us to Samson's prayer. Note the shift in his posture ([READ Judges 16:20](#)). This was tragic and telling. But once brought low ([READ Judges 16:28](#)). His motives may not have been perfect. But we read in Hebrews ([READ Hebrews 11:32-34](#)). He is no longer self-deluded, self-directed, and self-dependent. This fallen foolish man is now crying out to the LORD in faith.

2. The LORD's response

And the LORD hears him ([READ Judges 16:29-30](#)). The Philistines were clearly not expecting this. They assumed that with his hair shaved and the vow broken, his strength was forever gone and the danger had passed. They assumed that the LORD was forever done with His servant.

In the words of Lee Corso, "Not so fast, my friends." Because we see here a deep hope.

Illustration:

We were discussing C. S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair* this past week in our Inklings Beyond group. There is a scene towards the end in which Aslan appears to the two children in this story, Jill and Eustace. Jill's mind is flooded with how things had gone so wrong on the quest. And much of it had to do with her. But listen to what happens. It's not what she expects ([READ](#)):

I have come,' said a deep voice behind them. They turned and saw the Lion himself, so bright and real and strong that everything else began at once to look pale and shadowy compared with him. And in less time than it takes to breathe Jill...remembered only how she had made Eustace fall over the cliff, and how she had helped to muff nearly all the signs, and about the snappings and quarrellings. And she wanted to say 'I'm sorry' but she could not speak.

Then the Lion drew them towards him with his eyes, and bent down and touched their pale faces with his tongue, and said: 'Think of that no more. I will not always be scolding. You have done the work for which I sent you into Narnia.'

Application:

What is this? It's the very thing we see in Judges 16 - a love that will not let us go. Write this down. The LORD is utterly for you. And intimately with you. He is utterly for you. And intimately with you. Now let's run a "what if" experiment on that. What if you were to step out into the events of this week, believing those things? What would happen if you knew He is utterly for you, despite how things look? What would change if you knew He is intimately with you, such that you have but to cry out to Him, in desperate dependency, and He will hear you?

The LORD is God. He is not like us. We have a deep hope. That should encourage us.

III. A GREAT SIGN

He gives a stern warning, a deep hope, and then, in and over all of this, a great sign.

A) Who We See

Who do we really see here? Samson is not just a picture for Israel. He is a type of Jesus.

1. Unlike each other

He is sign pointing ahead to the greater Judge. To be sure, Samson was unlike Jesus in that he was bound in that temple because of his own doing. And there were limits to this deliverance.

2. Like each other

But Samson and Jesus are like one another in some striking ways. In how they died - both were betrayed, handed over, bound, tortured, mocked, dying alone with arms spread apart. Both struck down by their enemies but crushing them in their death. Some striking similarities.

B) What This Shows

What does that show? Is it all just an odd coincidence? A strange fluke of history?

1. Great power

Hardly. This is sure testimony to the great power of God. He is the author of history. He has written the plot and interwoven such repeating themes. Why? To get our hard wrought attention.

2. Great love

Which is testimony not just to His great power but His great love. He wants His people in every age, wherever we are on the timeline, to see these things. Do you see the trouble He has taken?

Samson's life is a great sign from a powerful God who is passionate for His people.

Illustration:

You can gauge the passion felt by the trouble taken. It can cost a lot to propose these days. Apparently, if you are serious, you need to be ready to spend \$2500 for the jumbotron at an MLB game, \$2000 on a skywriter, \$500 on an airplane banner, \$2000 on a flash mob, or \$5000 on a movie trailer. Perhaps so. In any case, great pains are taken to prove great love.

Application:

The point being that the connections between Samson and Jesus are no accident. It's part of a plan written and carried out. God forms the fabric of history for our sake. And our lives too.

Think with me. Every part of your past - all of it - was in and from His hand. And meant to draw your heart to Jesus. Think of it. You may want to take some time to talk to Him about it.

The LORD is God. He is not like us. He gives a great sign. This should encourage us.

CONCLUSION:

How do we lay hold of this? How can these things go deep in us such that we begin to change? Let's go back to that scene from *The Silver Chair* and read a bit of it again ([READ](#)):

I have come,' said a deep voice behind them. They turned and saw the Lion himself, so bright and real and strong that everything else began at once to look pale and shadowy compared with him.

This what Jill needed - a clear vision of the great magnificent Lion, Aslan. Time and again in these stories, such a vision has a revealing and transforming effect upon those in his presence.

That's what we need. That's who we need. For these things to go deep within us, we need our gaze to be set upon Jesus. Not just occasionally but continually that we would really come to know Him. Not just individually but corporately that we would see Him more truly.

What would that mean for you? What would it mean for you to be setting your gaze on Him continually? What would it mean for us to be setting our gaze on Him corporately?

The LORD is God. He is not like us. This should encourage us. And drive us to Him.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The LORD is God. He is not like us.
(anchor) This should encourage us.