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DRIVING ON AN EMPTY TANK!

Today's Text: Judges, Chaps. 13-16

Extract:

“And she [Delilah] said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist [knew] not that the Lord was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes” [Judg. 16: 20-21(a)]

As you approach a gas (i.e., petrol) station along a typical American inter-state highway, you will see a big bold sign, which tells you that there is a place half-a-mile ahead where you can stop to refuel your vehicle or use the restrooms or restaurants. Just in case you have not paid attention to that advice, another sign will alert you just close to that station as follows, “the next gas station is 35 miles away.” The distance varies. The choice is then yours to stop or to drive on. If you believe that you have enough fuel in your tank to take you to the next station 35 miles or so ahead (depending on the distance indicated on the bill board), you may not stop. However, some motorists, out of human or mechanical error, may drive on without stopping. Then, in-between two stations, they suddenly find their vehicles losing speed until they come to a final halt. What happened? They were driving on an empty tank!

Many believers find themselves in a similar situation. When they became truly born-again, they were filled with the Holy Spirit who thereafter began to manifest in them talents [physical, professional and spiritual] with which they should glorify God. They begin to perform wonders that win admiration from family, friends and colleagues, converts for God and, of course, heightened attacks from satanic forces. Then, sooner than later, they realize that the fire is gone, in spite of the fact that they are working harder than ever before! The trouble is that they may not have realized when they began to lose the fire! That is why David prayed, “Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me” [Ps. 51: 11].

What has happened and how do we avoid or get out of such circumstances? In today's lesson, we shall use the story of Samson's fall and restoration as our study guide.

1. Samson was not a giant!

After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel did not have a strong national leader that all of them could turn to in time of distress. Consequently, each time they sinned and disobeyed God, the new nation of Israel fell under the control of pagan nations around them. However, when they repented and cried for His deliverance, God raised a judge to rescue them. One such judge was Samson who judged Israel for 20 years [**Judg. 15: 20**].

Samson was born miraculously. His father, Manoah, from the tribe of Dan, was married to a barren woman. At the time, the children of Israel “did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years” [**Judg. 13: 1-2**]. One day, an angel of God appeared to Manoah’s wife to assure her that she was going to be the proud mother of a son who would deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines. However, there was an important condition: *she should not drink wine or any alcoholic drink or eat any unclean food during her pregnancy because* “thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb” [**vv. 3-5**].

A Nazarite is a person who is especially consecrated to God. Examples in the Bible are Samson, Samuel [**1 Sam. 1: 11-28**] and John the Baptist [**Lk 1: 13-15**]. Apart from the rituals required of them, such as no wine or strong drink, no shaving or defilement [**Num. 6: 3-7**], they were expected to live corruption-free [**Amos 2: 11-12**] and holy lives [**Num. 6: 8**]. A person became a Nazarite by birth, as in the case of Samson and John the Baptist, or by vow [**Num. 6:2**] as in the case of Samuel. In the latter sense, believers are Nazarites for “what agreement hath the temple of the living God with idols; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” [**2 Cor. 6: 16-17**]. It is instructive that in several Christian denominations, members are enjoined to avoid alcoholic drinks.

A son was in deed born to Manoah and his wife and they named him Samson. The “child grew and the Lord blessed him. *And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times*” [**Judg. 13: 24-25**]. In no time, it became clear that God’s gift for him was extraordinary physical strength [**Judg. 16: 5**]. When the Spirit of God came upon him, he performed feats, which defied human comprehension. For example:

- He killed a lion with his bare hands [**Judg. 14: 5-6**]
- He caught 300 foxes and tied them together tail-to-tail and lighted torches of fire in-between with which he burned up the farm lands of the Philistines [**Judg. 15: 4-5**]

- With the jawbone of an ass, he killed one thousand Philistines! **[Judg. 15: 14-16]**
- Several times, his enemies tied him down with strong ropes while he was asleep. He would wake up and simply “brake them from off his arms like a thread” **[Judg. 16: 12]**.

Nevertheless, Samson was not a giant! How do we know that? First, if he were a giant, the Philistines would not again turn around to bribe Delilah, his Philistine girlfriend to “entice him *and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him*” **[Judg. 16: 5]**. Second, if he were a giant, the Bible would say so! We were told that the Anakims were giants and when 10 of the 12 spies sent by Moses saw them, they became terrified: “We saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come out of the giants; *and we were in our own sights as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight*” **[Num. 13: 33]**. Goliath was a giant whose mere presence scared the army of Israel to death. Here are his vital statistics **[1 Sam. 17: 4-7]**:

- Height- 6 cubits and a span. In Hebrew measures, a span is half-a-cubit and a cubit is the length of the forearm, which is on the average taken as 1.5 feet. Therefore, Goliath was almost ten feet tall [3 metres]!
- Coat armour-weighed 5,000 shekels of brass; that is 125 lb. or 57 kg.
- Head of his spear weighed 600 shekels of iron; that is 15 lb. or 7 kg.

You could not miss that kind of man in a crowd! But Samson was an ordinary person like us until the Holy Spirit descended upon him and he did exploits. So, it is “not by might, nor by power, *but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*” **[Zech. 4: 6]**, and “the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” **[Dan. 11: 32]**. Therefore, Samson’s story is about us and about our daily relationship with God.

2. When it comes to fueling your vehicle, once is not enough!

When the Spirit of God began to manifest in Samson, he was like a full tank! For example, when “a young lion roared against him, and *the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand*” **[Judg. 14: 5-6]**. However, by the time that Samson was betrayed by Delilah and delivered into the hands of the Philistines, he was driving on an empty tank: “he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. *And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. But the Philistines took him and put out his eyes*” **[Judg. 16: 20-21]**. So, what went wrong? Why did the Holy Spirit abandon Samson? Here are some of the reasons:

a) *Sin*

When Samson married a Philistine wife, it was in the will of God because He was going to use that means to destroy the enemies of Israel [**Judg. 14: 4**]. However, his failure began when he had an adulterous affair with a harlot in Gaza [**Judg. 16: 1**]. He did not lose the presence of the Holy Spirit soon after for the following reasons, among others:

- ✓ God is patient and long-suffering towards the sinner “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” [**2 Pet. 3: 9**]. After God had brought to David’s attention his sins of adultery and murder concerning Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah, David confessed his sins and said, “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. *Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me*” [**Ps. 51: 10-11**]. God forgave him and Jesus Christ is called the Son of David! [**Lk 1:32**]
- ✓ When God’s integrity is on the line, He can use anybody or anything to achieve His purposes, *irrespective of their spiritual state*. For example, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that “the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth Mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them” [**Ex. 7: 5**]. Cyrus was a Babylonian ruler that God used to restore post-exilic Israel. God called him His anointed “whose right hand I have beholden, to subdue nations before him.... *For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel Mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name, though thou hast not known Me*” [**Is. 45: 1,4**]. It is for this reason that we should not measure the presence of the Holy Spirit in us by His gifts [**1 Cor. 12: 4-10**], which He can assign “to every man severally as *He will*” [**v. 11**]. That is why Jesus says that we shall be known by our fruits [**Matt. 7: 20**], that is, the fruits of the Holy Spirit [**Gal. 5: 22-23**].

Samson’s powerlessness grew *as he persisted in sin*. From the harlot in Gaza, he went on to befriend another Philistine beauty, Delilah. It was there that reality caught up with him. God had used Samson to rescue the children of Israel from the control of the Philistines for 20 years. The time had come for Samson to honour God for blessing him with the power to rule over His people for such a long time. In like manner, God is asking us believers this moment, “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” [**1 Cor. 6: 19**]. If we do not answer Him in the affirmative, we are depleting fast our gas tanks.

b) *Complacency and flippancy*

Samson began to play games with the power of God in him. He knew that the Philistines were trying to use his lover, Delilah, to get him. Several times she probed him to obtain the source of his power. Each time he told her a secret (a lie, of course!), she used it immediately to get him harmed [**Judg. 16: 5-15**]. That should have been enough warning that Satan was trying to destroy him. However, he felt that he was always going to be safe. After all, when he was with the harlot in Gaza and the Philistines thought that they had helmed him in, did he not take all the city defences and put them on top of the hill in Hebron [**Judg. 16: 3**]? Many church leaders today practise immorality in secret and they believe all is normal because many miracles are still being reported through their ministries.

Satan hardly gives up, and the harder the case, the more reinforcements he brings in [**Matt. 12: 43-45**]. Delilah “pressed him *daily* with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, *that he told her all his heart*” [**Judg. 16: 16-17**]. She made him sleep upon her knees (she might have used substances such as alcohol!) and shaved off the seven locks of hair on his head. Then, she woke him up while at the same time bringing the Philistines to get him. The man of God was now an ordinary man of flesh. They caught him cheaply and took out his eyes [**vv. 16-21**] for “the light of the body is the eye” [**Lk 11:34**]. Now, he would leave Philistine women alone because he could no longer see them!

3. Lessons: refuel your Christian life at Christ’s gas station!

Let us not make the mistake to think that we can avoid what happened to Samson for “it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not” [**Lam. 3: 22**]. Rather, we should learn the right lessons so as to continue to drive without running out of gas. Here are some lessons from Samson’s story:

a) *Don’t wait for your tank to be empty before you refuel*

Motorists have different habits when it comes to refueling. Some may visit the gas station everyday but they never fill up the tank! It may be for cost reasons. Some others wait until the vehicle begins to signal that the gas level is almost zero. If they are lucky, there may be a station nearby. Otherwise, they may have to push the car there!

As we use the spiritual powers that God has given us, we are depleting the supply. When the woman with the issue of blood had touched the helm of the garment of Jesus, she became healed but Jesus said, “somebody hath touched Me; *for I perceive that virtue (i.e., power) is gone out of Me*”

[Lk 8: 46]. Therefore, we need to go back to God Himself to replenish us. We can do this by:

- ✓ Taking time off from our busy schedules to pray because that is the only way that we communicate with God. Jesus had the habit of sending the crowds away while He would go alone into the mountain to pray **[Mk 6: 46]**. Apart from praying without ceasing **[1 Thes. 5: 17]**, we should form the habit of going to church to worship and praise God **[Ps. 122:1; Hab. 2:20]**. David said, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, *that will I seek after*, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple” **[Ps. 27:4]**.
- ✓ Saturating our minds with the word of God through reading, studying and meditating on it. Those who do so “shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; ...and *whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*” **[Ps. 1: 3]**.
- ✓ Confessing our sins each time we fall for “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from *all unrighteousness*” **[1 Jn 1: 9]**.

b) *Measure your gas level by the fruits of the Holy Spirit*

We can easily be deceived about the state of our relationship with God when we look at the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in believers living in sin. Even when King Saul had a dagger in his armour to kill David, he began to prophesy when he came among the prophets **[1 Sam. 19:18-24]**. That is why Jesus has taught us to look at the fruits. If we do not demonstrate in our daily living love, joy, peace, faith, endurance, a forgiving spirit and fear of the Lord, among others, the likelihood is that our spiritual tank needs to be replenished.

4. Conclusion

Your journey with God is *eternal*. However, the segment of it on earth is brief and treacherous. It is here on earth that you choose where you want to spend the rest of eternity. God has equipped you with physical and spiritual talents to make a successful journey back home to Heaven. Like Samson, you can choose to use such talents in God’s service or show them off in self-aggrandizement. You may fall or falter but you should never stay fallen. Instead, always return to God’s ‘gas stations’ [Scripture, church, fellowship, holy living, etc.] to refuel. Samson’s hair grew back. So will God replenish your empty tanks! Stop driving on an empty tank.