

Samson's Riddle



John Kennedy

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*“Out of the eater came forth meat, and
out of the strong came forth sweetness”*
Judges 14:14.

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It does, at first sight, seem strange, after an announcement from Heaven of his birth, after the coming of an angel to give directions as to his rearing, after being told that the Lord blessed him, and that, “the Spirit of the Lord moved him,” and that he was a true believer, to find that it was muscular power that was Samson’s great endowment, and that his passions were so unsubdued. But great strength was just what was needed then, “for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel;” and even Samson’s strong passions were overruled for the discomfiture of the enemies of his country.

When one thinks of how great, in the view of God, was His scheme of redemption, and of how important to the Church the revelation of it was, we cannot wonder if there should be frequent promises given of Messiah and predictions of His incarnation, death, and kingdom — many typical objects and rites to represent Him, not a few whose lives were emblematical of that of the promised One, and even epochs of history so arranged as to furnish an allegory of the “better things to come.” Anyone who is duly impressed with the greatness of redemption, and who thinks at all according to the mind of God regarding it, cannot wonder if things and men and epochs manifold should be shadowing forth in past ages the fulfilment of the promise of the Redeemer. God could not have been silent regarding Him who, as His only begotten Son, was the object of His infinite love, and who, as Messiah, was the gift of His love to the Church. And He was not silent; for He spoke regarding Him to the Old Testament Church through promises, prophecies, typical rites, and typical men, and through the dealings of His providence with a nation, as well as with individuals.

One of the typical men was Samson. He was well fitted to represent the Messiah as the “Saviour” whom “God raised unto Israel.” Samson’s name means “distinguished” or “strong,” and we may well apply it to him with both these meanings. The Lord made him distinguished, and He made him strong, and He did both that He might exhibit through him His Messiah to His people. In course of his going down for a wife to Timnath, “a young lion roared against him.” “The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him,” and “he rent him as he would have rent a kid.” Returning “after a time, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion; and, behold,

there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion.” He himself having partaken of the honey first, gave some of it also to his parents, but how he had procured it he kept as a secret. This secret furnished him with a riddle at the marriage-feast. As no one could taste the sweet meat but those to whom he gave it, so none could solve the riddle to whom he did not unfold its meaning. So far he most fitly typifies Him who came down from Heaven “to seek and to save” the objects of His love, and who encountered “him that had the power of death,” and by death destroyed him, thus securing to His Church both meat and sweetness, for which none shall partake except such as receive these from Him, and the mode of obtaining which none can understand except such as are His disciples. Looking at this riddle as no longer Samson’s, but Christ’s, let us consider —

1. This riddle presents to us *the mystery of the Cross*. “God raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.” He was “manifested to destroy the works of the Devil,” and to procure redemption for a people who were both prisoners and slaves. These two designs could only be accomplished together, and only *by death*. As no meat could come out of the eater unless the eater had been slain, so there could be no redemption to Israel unless Christ, by His death, had destroyed “him that had the power of death.” But the meat was not produced by “the eater,” though it came out of him. The lion was dead, and could not be an “eater,” and only in his dead carcass could the honey be stored by the “swarm of bees” whose work it was to gather it. All that is “meat” and “sweetness” as the result of the “death of death in the death of Christ” is due to the grace of God, which found in Him who died and rose again a place in which the blessings of the Everlasting Covenant might be stored, and a way by which the Holy Spirit might come forth to dispense them.

Let it be no difficulty to your mind to think of a living Samson while looking on the dead lion. Samson only risked his life, while Christ actually laid His down. Yet do not think that you have in this what utterly unfits the one for being an emblem of the other. The actual death of Christ *only secured redemption by destroying* “him that had the power of death.” But I see a living High Priest beside the slain sacrifice, who can present Himself as “the Lamb that was

slain” before God. And I have before me Him who was dead, alive again, and “alive forevermore,” to dispense to the objects of His love the blessings of the covenant which He sealed by His blood. What was awaiting in his encounter with the Lion to complete Samson’s representation of Christ in His actual dying “for the ungodly,” was made up by the mode in which he willingly sacrificed his life at the last that enemies of Israel might perish through his death.

Think of all the “meat” and “sweetness” secured by the death of Christ to redeemed Israel — the infinite fullness of God’s covenant grace brought nigh by the Gospel in which Christ crucified is preached. What a honeycomb that is which is near us in the Gospel, each one of the “exceeding great and precious promises” a cell full — fraught with the rich grace of God! All this is brought near to you, and may be claimed by you if you reach Christ crucified in faith, and take your stand as a sinner on His precious blood. But you require a living Christ to secure to you any benefit from His death. Samson’s parents tasted the honey only when their son gave it to them. And what he procured by risking his life he gave ungrudgingly. Is not Christ’s love worthy of more trust than Samson’s? Count it no hardship that you must owe to the gracious power of the living, the enjoyment of what was secured by the atonement of the slain Lamb.

To partake of the grace of the blood-sealed covenant would secure to you both “meat” and “sweetness:” both what would strengthen and what would gladden you. Entering through the death of Christ amidst the riches of the grace of God, you would attain to a child’s confidence towards the grace of God: and you would be no coward in the conflict to which the soldiers of Jesus Christ are called. As a child, as a servant, and as a soldier, you need both “meat” and “sweetness,” and “the eater” and “the strong” would yield both to you, if through “the blood” you reached the grace “of the Everlasting Covenant.”

2. This riddle may be viewed as referring to *the blessed results of affliction to the Lord’s children*. These encounter “eaters” and are called to combat with “the strong.” This is their frequent experience as they bear the various trials of providence, as they endure

persecution from the world, as they are engaged in conflict with the strong corruption of their old hearts, and as they are assaulted by the power of “the wicked one.” All these are painfully felt to be “eaters” and “strong.”

But all these trials have in them *no destroying power*. The entire removal of the curse has made the children of God indestructible. The death of Christ effected the removal of the curse from them when that death was, in the day of their justification, placed to their account by God. Trouble is no longer armed with the curse to them. It may smite them so as to pain them, but it cannot smite them so as to slay them. I could easily conceive a very nervous person trembling at the sight of a dead lion. It could do him no harm, for it was utterly dead, and it was utterly unreasonable to be afraid because near it. Just as little reason has the child of God to be afraid of all the troubles which he may have to encounter; but how often does he tremble when he comes near to them. Friend, you will never get rid of that cowardice but at the Cross of Christ, on which the curse was utterly exhausted in the death of your Surety. As you appropriate Him, and redemption through His blood, all troubles will appear as thoroughly powerless to harm you as was the carcass of the slain lion in the vineyard of Timnath.

The afflictions of the righteous are not only powerless to harm, *but they are made profitable*. Thus they cannot be without the grace of God. If there were no honey in the carcass of the lion, there could not come “meat” and “sweetness” out of it. But through the death of Christ grace comes to the believer in his time of trial, and it is because of this that “tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.” Because of this, instead of being scared by tribulation on account of the pain it causes, he glories in it on account of the good fruit it produces. It yields to him “meat” and “sweetness” to which, without affliction, he would have been an utter stranger.

3. The riddle points to *the death of the saints*. How often, when looking forward to it, does it seem to be an “eater” ready to devour, and a “strong” one before whom all shall be laid low? An “eater,” verily, is death if armed with sin as its “sting;” and “strong” is the “eater,” for its power shall bring all the Christless down into the

depths of an eternal Hell. Ah, friend, if you are away from the Cross of Christ you have no right to be aught else than afraid before it. But if you, with the eye of faith, see death deprived of its sting by the death of the Cross, and can grasp Him who “died and rose again” with the hand of faith, then you may expect to taste ineffable sweetness in the result of your dying. For what does death yield to the believer?

(1). *An end to all the troubles of this life.* These often were felt to be drowning floods, as they went down into them, and seemed to be a sea without a further shore. To their eyes there seemed to be a haze on the horizon, towards which their gaze was directed, which made it impossible for them to discern aught but sea. They often feared that the time would never come, in which to them there shall be “no more sea.” But passing through death the believer passes beyond the reach of all the trials of this life. Nothing does he carry with him that can disturb, and none to trouble him shall either accompany or follow him.

(2). In death there shall be *a final end of all sin.* It is not by his own death that sin shall be annihilated in the soul of the believer, but in his dying, the Lord’s sanctifying power shall pass through all his being, consuming into utter extinction all sin, till the soul, perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, shall pass into a region in which there shall be no temptation, and where God, in the unchangeableness of His love, in the glory of His holiness, and in the omnipotence of His power, shall compass him to preserve him in the beauty of His own likeness, and in the bliss of His own fellowship for evermore. You need not shrink, believer, from parting with the body of dust that is on you, for you shall, at the same moment, part with the body of death that is *in* you. O what shall it be to emerge out of the wearying and wearied body with an *understanding* in which there shall no more be darkness, a *will* that never shall for a moment, or in the least degree, decline from the will of God, a *conscience* which shall be for evermore under the full sunshine of God’s manifested favour, a *memory* that shall recall aught that it shall not be joy to remember, and a *heart* in which perfect love to God shall sway every spring of action, and whose every desire shall be filled with the expressed love and with the outshining glory of Jehovah! Let the living body become a carcass

if this sweetness is to follow the dying.

(3). To pass through death *is to enjoy all the sweetness of the home-rest, of the temple-worship, and of the palace-glory of Heaven.* What home-rest it shall be to be near to the Man Christ Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, the good Shepherd who graciously tended His flock throughout all the wilderness way, and to have nothing within or near that can mar the joy of this fellowship! How perfected love will then go forth, fervently and adoringly, in a service in which there can be no shortcoming, as it is attracted by the glory that shall shine on it forever from “the throne of God and of the Lamb!” And what eternal wonder shall fill thy soul, believer, as thou find thyself at home amidst the glory of the Father’s house — a palace adapted to the presence of Jehovah on His eternal throne.

Application 1. Let all remember that death has to be encountered, either as it meets those who are in the Lord, or as armed with the sting of sin, and clothed with all the terrors of the curse. If you are not in Christ, death will be as the living lion roaring for his prey to you. How fearful a meeting that of a weak, guilty, filthy sinner with an accursed death, whose work is utter destruction, and through an experience of which the Christless pass “into everlasting punishment.” Right before you is such a death if you are without true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not more surely did the roaring lion meet Samson than what is unspeakably more awful shall be met by you, if you still continue to move as you have been moving in the past, for, “he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Application 2. Look through Samson’s conflict with the lion to Christ’s conflict with death. Like Samson, He is all alone. It was well for Samson’s friends that he was all alone when the “young lion roared against him,” for it was his being alone which secured benefit to them. He went before them, and he went aside from them, and won the victory all alone; and therefore he went before them and with them, and carried to them the fruits of his triumph. Thus acts Christ in relation to His friends. All alone as their Substitute, He met and “destroyed him that had the power of death,” that “out of the slain eater might come meat” to them, and out of the

conquered “strong” might come “sweetness” to them. He has left only a slain lion to look at when in faith you forecast the death that awaits you in Him; and because of His having triumphed over “the strong man,” there are both “meat” and “sweetness” to be found, as well as rest before you. But you will attain to this only as He is with you, and as He, by His Spirit, applies to you the word of His grace. His parents needed the presence of a living Samson, as well as the triumph of a Samson who had risked his life. You need the power of a living Christ to apply to you what the slain Christ secured for you. O is He not “all in all?”

Application 3. Do not expect to know the mystery of the Cross without the teaching of the Spirit of Christ. None could solve his riddle but Samson himself. None can open your understanding to understand the doctrine of the Cross but the Holy One, who has the unction which enables one to “know all things.” Let your cry be to Him for the opening of your eyes. Beware of a Delilah’s deceit, but learn a lesson of importunity from her, as she persistently urged Samson to disclose to her his secret. Christ has no reason for hiding the truth from any who desire to know it; and surely He has encouraged you to ask the saving knowledge of the truth when He says, “Turn ye at My reproof; I will pour out My Spirit on you, I will make known My words unto you.”

